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screen

Special issue: adaptation and the literary film

***Hamlet* in Bombay**

Scorsese/Davies/Wharton: 'literariness' in the literary film

Dames and ladies: acting, adaptation and national cinema

***Beau Travail* and 'free adaptation'**

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Sohrab Modi in his *Hamlet alias Khoon ka Khoon* (1935) Picture courtesy The Indian Film Archive

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Introduction: adaptation and the literary film

There is a sequence towards the end of Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993) in which Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis) makes one of his two failed attempts to tell his wife, May (Winona Ryder), that their marriage is a pretence and that he is in love with her cousin, the Countess Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer) The film is set in New York in the 1870s This scene takes place in the drawing room, it is evening, the oil lamps are lit and there is a bright fire in the grate May is seated. Newland stands, and the scene is marked by hesitation and hiatus as Newland struggles and fails to speak the fatal words, and May fails – or refuses – to hear them In one of the pauses there is an odd cutaway to the fireplace, one of the figurative motifs of the film, and a burning coal falls forward in the grate an odd, unmotivated cutaway in a scene in which the tension is generated by formal and static midshots

If we turn to Scorsese's source text, Edith Wharton's 1920 novel, the scene appears as follows

> He understood that his own eyes must be unbearable, and turning away, rested his elbows on the mantelshelf and covered his face Something drummed and clanged furiously in his ears, he could not tell if it were the blood in his veins, or the tick of the clock on the mantel
>
> May sat without moving or speaking while the clock slowly measured out five minutes. A lump of coal fell forward in the grate, and hearing her rise to push it back, Archer turned and faced her.[1]

Scorsese's slightly awkward cutaway in 1993, technically unmotivated in the film, finds its motivation in Wharton's novel from 1920

1 Edith Wharton *The Age of Innocence* in *Three Novels of Old New York* (Harmondsworth Penguin 1994) p 952

The example confirms, of course, what we all knew, that Scorsese's adaptation is remarkably close to his literary source What seems more interesting, however, is what we can take from it about the relationship between literary and filmic figuration The falling coal which Wharton uses as a metaphoric figure for the passing of time and silence becomes in Scorsese's film an image of an actual profilmic event which interrupts and materializes time and silence. On the other hand, the five minutes of silence and stillness which passes in Wharton's novel is impossible within the economy of narrative in Scorsese's film, and has to be condensed in the shot of the falling coal. Processes of metaphor and condensation, the literal and the figurative, pass back and forward in this filmic and literary moment. Perhaps most intriguingly, Wharton in 1920 uses a device in her novel – the cutaway – which is already a familiar device of film language, and one begins to get a sense that the movement between the structures and language of literature and film need not be considered a one-way traffic. As Eisenstein recognized from Dickens and Griffith, it is not simply stories but structures and syntax which are adapted

Historically, critical writing on adaptation has not sat easily within film or television studies. Much of the historic critical literature seemed to be concerned more or less explicitly with fidelity to source Much of it seemed motivated by a perfectly laudable concern among literature departments to come to terms with film, and its perspectives were literary and often innocent of the theoretical concerns which motivated film or television studies. There were exceptions, and Bazin, in this as in so many other areas, deserves to be revisited What seemed missing, however, in the conversation between film and literature was the kind of concern with language and figuration which can be derived from the example above and which runs through a number of the essays in this special issue

More recently, in Britain at least, the focus on adaptation has reflected the concerns of the debates about the so-called 'heritage film', a large and growing body of films and television 'classic' serials which seem to have been argued into something like a genre The critical literature which has accumulated around the 'heritage film' has addressed very important questions of nationality, history and memory. It seems debilitated, however, by the sense that the heritage film is always already contaminated by its association with the heritage industry, enterprise culture and the commodification of the past. By appealing to such obvious bad objects, the criticism seems endlessly condemned to self-confirmation

The essays in this issue, from very different perspectives, suggest ways in which both questions of language and figuration and questions of history, memory and the national past can be approached in more articulated ways by freeing the films from the generalities of genre and, indeed, from the assumptions of adaptation

itself The notion of the literary film implies a common concern in this issue to complement formal analysis with broader social discourses and specifically cinematic concerns: (postmodern) intertext, (postcolonial) hybridity, the performance of gender and the knowing spectator.

In her essay, Belén Vidal Villasur goes beyond adaptation and introduces the category of the 'literary film', which would include such films as *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993) or *Ridicule* (Patrice Leconte, 1996). Using Roman Jakobson's notion of 'literariness' as language conscious of itself, she suggests ways in which the pictorial forms of Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* and Terence Davies's *The House of Mirth* (2000) – and in particular their use of the *tableau vivant* – represent a visual language which is conscious of itself, offering a resistance to the organic, nostalgic and generalized 'pastness' which is associated with the 'heritage film'.

Esha Niyogi De also goes beyond the usual terms in which adaptation has been considered, and takes two Indian adaptations of *Hamlet*, one from the colonial period (1935) and the other, a close appropriation of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), from the period after Independence (1954) In this way she is able to address at different points in India's history – the colonial and the postcolonial – questions not simply of adaptation, but of the translation and hybridization of an imperial and imperious 'master text'.

Christine Geraghty also addresses questions of the national in an essay which looks at the ways in which 'classic' adaptations like *Emma* (Douglas McGrath, 1996) and *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) have opened a space in which the particular kinds of acting and forms of stardom associated with British 'ladies' rather than Hollywood 'dames' have been revalued As well as raising questions about the national specificity of acting, and in particular acting by women, her essay recognizes the centrality of acting and performance to the pleasure of classic adaptation, an 'unliterary' pleasure which stands alongside, or rematerializes, perhaps, the pleasures of literary language

Finally, Catherine Grant looks at a boundary case, a film whose relationship to its source is oblique rather than direct Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* (1999) which is 'inspired by' Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* Her essay on 'free' adaptation draws on Genette's notion of transtextuality, transgressing the boundaries of 'fidelity', and asks also how this 'free dependency' can be represented to the knowing and the unknowing spectator. With reference to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, she posits an epistemology of secrets that pervades both Melville's nineteenth-century novella and the multiple intertexts that beckon to contemporary audiences.

The authors, then, begin to disentangle the particularities of adaptation and the literary film from the generalities While the 'old questions' of fidelity, heritage and genre have opened important

territory, the 'new questions' of language, performance, hybridity and translation suggest ways in which an understanding of adaptation and the literary film can contribute to the central concerns of film and television theory and criticism. Basing their discussion on the analysis of films within their specific signifying practices and their historical and national contexts, the essays begin to draw a more detailed map of the landscape and to trace new and productive ways of reconnecting film and literature

Classic adaptations, modern reinventions: reading the image in the contemporary literary film

BELÉN VIDAL VILLASUR

Those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere [1]

1 Roland Barthes *S/Z* trans Richard Miller (New York Hill and Wang 1974) p 16

In the last decade, a number of films have brought a different quality to a film practice often dismissed as conventional or conservative, the period drama, and particularly the classic adaptation. Films like *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990), *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992), *La Reine Margot* (Patrice Chéreau, 1994) or *The Portrait of a Lady* (Jane Campion, 1996) engage with the literary in different ways, but it is their distinctive mise-en-scene that makes them complex artefacts and visually very sophisticated. However, the critical denomination 'literary adaptations' tends to iron out the heterogeneity – and indeed, the unconventionality – of many of these postclassical period films. *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), *Carrington* (Christopher Hampton, 1995), *Ridicule* (Patrice Leconte, 1996), *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998), or *Quills* (Philip Kaufman, 1999) extend the use of the term 'literary' to different reinterpretations of a cultural past modeled after the plastic, literary but, above all, *cinematic* legacy. The iconography and narrative conventions deployed by these and other films both call forth and playfully betray a popular knowledge of the (European) past beyond the versions sanctioned by official history, and official literary history. These films are first and foremost symptomatic of the contemporary imagination, offering unfamiliar takes on familiar myths.

The *a priori* heterodox ways in which contemporary film has reimagined the cultural past[2] provide a useful background for understanding the peculiar relations of film with literary heritage in what have traditionally been called 'classic adaptations'. Whereas more self-conscious intertextual practices have rapidly found their slot in the taxonomy of the postmodern (such is the case of the parody, the pastiche or the rewriting of literary texts in updated form), the conspicuous phenomenon of classic adaptation remains somehow resistant to classification, other than as prestigious cultural commodity More or less free 'up-daptations' from the Shakespearean canon, such as *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, 1996), *Love's Labour's Lost* (Kenneth Branagh, 2000), or the most recent revisiting of *Hamlet* (Michael Almereyda, 2000) can be approached via their borrowings from different genres (the aesthetics of the youth film, the musical) However, the 'classics-done-straight', usually in the format of period/costume dramas, are too often regarded as antiques from an earlier film era, or disparagingly compared to the so-called literary 'originals'

This said, by 'classic' I mean not adaptations of texts enshrined in literary history, but rather films that follow a mimetic or (conventionally) realist model in order to transpose to the screen a text of the past, or a text set in the past [3] The classic adaptation is just one particular example of the literary film, explicitly seeking identification with its referent on the basis of narrative structure (and in the way the film presents itself to its audience) while implicitly mobilizing the signs of 'the literary' by means of a careful recreation of period detail. The marks of temporal distance in the mise-en-scene (locations, costume, narrative voiceover, and so on) have turned into an integral part of the distinctive aesthetics of the classic adaptation, making inevitable a certain degree of reflexivity.

However, classic adaptation has more often been regarded as an outlet for nostalgia, nostalgia not only for the idea of a closed and familiar past, but for a 'deep' narrative model that seems to have disappeared from mainstream film.[4] In practice, the term is heavily overdetermined by (mostly negative) critical connotations, especially in the context of British cinema, where the broader cultural category of 'heritage' seems to overlap adaptations, period dramas and historical films as 'quality' production Heritage critics and adaptation critics alike have treated these films as time-travel experiences, which can provide safe hiding places from the ironic turns of postmodernism The case of the Merchant/Ivory/Jhabvala cycle has become perhaps the paradigmatic example of 'period drama-as-bad-object' in the 1990s: as adaptations, James Ivory's films are often dismissed as reductive versions of the novels by E.M. Forster and Henry James, as heritage films, they have been questioned on the basis of an allegedly 'decorative' aesthetics aimed at uncritical consumption [5] For the critics of heritage, the 'past-as-present' mode

2 In particular see post-heritage critics who point out the viewing pleasures afforded by contemporary period drama The following list is far from exhaustive Stella Bruzzi *Undressing Cinema Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London and New York Routledge 1997) Pamela Church Gibson Fewer weddings and more funerals changes in the heritage film in Robert Murphy (ed) *British Cinema of the 90s* (London British Film Institute 2000) pp 115–24 Richard Dyer Nice young men who sell antiques gay men in heritage cinema in Ginette Vincendeau (ed) *Film/Literature/Heritage A Sight and Sound Reader* (London British Film Institute 2001) Claire Monk The British heritage film and its critics' *Critical Survey* vol 7 no 2 (1995) pp 116–24 Julianne Pidduck Of windows and country walks frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations *Screen*, vol 39 no 4 (1998) pp 381–400, Ginette Vincendeau s introduction to her *Film/Literature/Heritage* Also on television period drama see John Caughie *Television Drama Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford and New York Oxford University Press 2000) ch 8

3 The understanding of the term classic that I am proposing here aims at shifting the emphasis from the literary source to the film text in order to encompass recent period/costume dramas regardless of the cultural status of their literary referents Films that update their classic sources or which are contemporaneous with them fall outside this category *Dangerous Liaisons* (Stephen Frears 1988) is in this sense a classic adaptation whereas *Cruel Intentions* (Roger Kumble 1999) also based on the epistolary novel by Choderlos de Laclos is not

4 See Timothy Corrigan *Film and Literature an Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River NJ Prentice Hall 1999) pp 72–8

in which some of these film narratives run cancels out the possibility of a critical view of the past.[6] This angle, however, overlooks the many intertextual pleasures of period aesthetics indispensable to contemporary 'classic' adaptations. Although my project does not seek to contest the problem of History in period drama, by addressing the dynamics between visuality and narrative in different representations of the past I would like to start redefining the progressive nature of the 'literary' in the classic adaptation.

The rage of the modernist critics against this apparent second coming of a *cinéma de papa* has glossed over the fact that, as Ginette Vincendeau argues, costume dramas from the postclassical period (1970s onwards) 'can only be highly aware of retracing earlier grounds' and in this sense are 'automatically mannerist and postmodern'.[7] Significantly enough, this tension in critical opinion effectively covers the evolution of the Ivory-directed films, from the purposefully classical *A Room With a View* (1986) to the purposefully mannerist *The Golden Bowl* (2000). It is a tension that can be extrapolated to other cases. Navigating between art cinema and popular cinema, European literary films (whether adaptations or not) have raised the spectre of national 'quality' cinema, but the 'offenders' are often recognized film auteurs relying on international coproduction consider, for example, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani and *The Elective Affinities* (1996), Olivier Assayas and *Les Destinées Sentimentales* (2000) or Raoul Ruiz and his *Time Regained* (2000). In the current moment of a growing circulation of images as cultural capital, literary transpositions build on an array of visual patterns that have their own genealogy and which are therefore self-referential. It is in this respect that, as Robert Stam points out, the practice of adaptation 'participates in a double intertextuality, one literary and the other cinematic',[8] which subsumes the discontinuities between literary and filmic traditions through narrative and the play of visual allusion.

The vogue of literary films indicates the development of a cycle of period dramas which, although not constituting a proper genre,[9] has somehow short-circuited modernity, evolving directly from classicism to the current postmodern moment. A different critical approach is thus needed which stresses the operations of rewriting conducted by these films rather than underplaying their singularity. The following pages examine this question in the light of two auteurist adaptations: Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993) and Terence Davies's *The House of Mirth* (2000), and suggest ways in which the term 'literary film' might provide a more useful area of enquiry.

The filmic and the literary

The Age of Innocence and *The House of Mirth* (based on two homonymous novels by the American writer Edith Wharton,

5 See especially Andrew Higson 'Representing the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film' in Lester Friedman (ed.) *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: University College London Press, 1993) pp. 109–29; Tana Wollen, 'Over our shoulders: nostalgic screen fictions for the 1980s' in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds), *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) pp. 178–93; Cairns Craig 'Rooms without a view', *Sight and Sound* vol. 1 no. 6 (1991) pp. 10–13.

6 In this respect the heritage critics quoted above consistently subscribe to the well-known Jamesonian argument indicting the transformation of History into a form of connotation (see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Cairns Craig in reference to *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987) and *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Charles Sturridge, 1991) argues: 'The authenticity of these films to the literary is fundamentally flawed in the relationship they set up between the historical and the contemporary. The audience is invited to understand the plot of the film as though we are *contemporary* with the characters while at the same time indulging our pleasure in a world which is visually compelling precisely because of its *pastness*' (Craig, 'Rooms without a view', p. 12).

7 Introduction to Vincendeau (ed.) *Film/Literature/Heritage*, p. xviii.

8 'Beyond fidelity: the dialogics of adaptation', in James Naremore (ed.) *Film Adaptation* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) p. 65.

9 See note 7.

1862–1937) are both exemplary classic adaptations in their handling of literary realism. However, the business of adaptation is never a straightforward operation of transposition. Instead, the adaptation trades (as Christopher Orr and John Ellis have pointed out)[10] with something altogether more diffuse: the memory of the literary referent and the fetishistic attachments of both critics and spectators.

In this respect, heritage criticism on adaptation has mobilized the literary in an almost opposite way to modernist film. Whereas modernism deploys a reflexive notion of the literary, which plays upon the disruption of conventional storytelling and uses complex frameworks of allusion, the 'quality' adaptation is seen to incorporate its literary referent as an external value, working towards readability and consensus. As a result, the label 'literary cinema' recalls a sociological rather than an aesthetic category. A film is called 'literary' because of its subject matter, the director's artistic persona, the audiences addressed, or because of an injection of literary components into its expressive devices.[11] This does not explain the nature of the relationships between the filmic and the literary as *process*: how does *the literary* work in contemporary cinema? Roman Jakobson refers to 'literariness' as 'language calling attention to itself, or a message in which the emphasis is placed on the form of utterance rather than on its referential capacity'.[12] Considered as intertext, as the product of the reflexive quality of its images, the literary can open paths to the work of memory *in* the film text – meaning the different investments in certain narratives of the past – but also to the memory *of* the text, or the operations of intertextuality that rewrite those received narratives. The broader term 'literary film' may encompass better than 'adaptation' a wide range of films that present different levels of play between the central intertext and the modes of subjectivity inscribed into the films' mise-en-scene of the past.

10 See John Ellis 'The literary adaptation' *Screen* vol 23 no 1 (1982) pp 3–5 and Christopher Orr 'The discourse on adaptation' *Wide Angle* vol 6 no 2 (1984) pp 72–6

11 Marie Claire Ropars *De la litterature au cinema. Genese d'une ecriture* (Paris: Colin 1970)

12 Quoted by Robert Scholes *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press 1982) p 58

Beyond adaptation: the 1990s literary film

The classic adaptation always exceeds the text adapted: in this formal excess lies the principle of intertextuality (as well as authorship). From the standpoint of heritage criticism, the images of the heritage film have a density which is not the symbolic density of the modernist auteur film but an accessible play with the signs of highbrow culture that reinforces narrativity and, therefore, realism.[13] However, the period film has not been impervious to the new forms of film writing. Thomas Elsaesser and Vicente J. Benet, in their detailed analyses of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) have pointed out how the visibility of technology in the narrative texture precludes the symbolic closure that had been codified in both classical cinema and its bourgeois model, realist

13 A notable exception is *The Portrait of a Lady* (Jane Campion 1996) which contains a short film-within-a-film (the oneiric sequence 'My Journey') which posits the disruption of the realist texture of the adaptation by using pastiche and collage

literature.[14] This is no less true of other postclassical costume dramas such as *The Age of Innocence*, whose organic temporality is constantly and consciously in tension with a hypertrophy of the visual. On the one hand, the drive for closure marks the desire for History; the literary would then appear as the vehicle of myth (which can be the myth of national identity, as heritage critics want it). On the other, the intertext of visual and cultural references disrupts the idea of realism and the idealistic notion of continuity with the past through mimetic reproduction.

The contemporary literary film may not sustain the opacity of the modernist symbol, but it certainly works on the hyperreality of the frame; its singularity resides not so much in the work of metaphor as in the movement of metonymy within the system of objects that construes the literary referent. The frame then becomes the privileged site of analysis, exposing the memory *of* the film text rather than the memory *in* the text determined by the strict mimesis of the narrative. In particular, the use of period painting (usually read as a cultural sign that triggers the memory of the literary past) becomes part of the intertext of the film in ways that resist symbolization. Both *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth* display various forms of *tableaux vivants* that work as a filmic trope, generating a semiotic space that complicates narrative realism and closure.[15] Far from the illustrative style that places the spectator in the position of the time-tourist, the *tableau* – site of intertextual allusion – also foregrounds the trace of the literary under the subjectivity inscribed in the film image. In this regard, the work of Roland Barthes appears as one ideal instrument of analysis. The ongoing concern with the image at the heart of his literary criticism discloses the transmission of a memory of the text that is overwhelmingly visual. The literary film should be given back the depth of its images while avoiding the 'deep' (comparative) readings that would take us back to the literary text as the keeper of a truth that has to be found in its film adaptation. Instead, the literary film can be used to foreground the complex configurations of subjectivity in the contemporary period drama.

The Age of Innocence: out of the past

Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* is a sumptuous period film and a good place to start exploring what 'post-heritage' may mean. Scorsese's approach to genre is based on a strong sense of its past history, which takes over the anxious realism that dominates his films. As Ian Christie has pointed out, the cinema of Scorsese expresses the longing for classical cinema from the standpoint of the Mannerist, 'condemned, like the artists who followed the High Renaissance, to echo and embellish the great unselfconscious works

14 Thomas Elsaesser 'Specularity and engulfment: Francis Ford Coppola and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*' in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds) *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998). Vicente J. Benet 'El relato y lo visible. A propósito de *Bram Stoker's Dracula*'. *Archivos de la Filmoteca* no. 21 (October 1995), pp. 113–29.

15 For a definition and an account of the occurrence of this practice in literature and its implications for feminist film theory, see Mary Chapman 'Living pictures: women and *tableaux vivants* in nineteenth-century American fiction and culture'. *Wide Angle* vol. 18, no. 3 (1996), pp. 22–52.

of the past'.[16] Such mannerism is synonymous with formal excess, which subverts the transparency of the representation and sets the grounds for the film's particular interpretation of Wharton's novel.

If the practice of classic adaptation implies almost by default an element of nostalgia, *The Age of Innocence* is doubly conditioned by the feeling of temporal displacement. Edith Wharton wrote about late nineteenth-century New York in 1920, after the First World War had wiped out the world of her youth. Her novel offers a first-hand account of a past still recognizable to her readership, yet she stands at sufficient distance from it to be able to subject it to a scathing critique. As her friend Henry James once remarked, '"The Angel of Devastation" was the mildest name we knew her by'.[17] *The Age of Innocence* accurately performs the novel's dissection of the power of social appearances but, unlike other mainstream period films, the frame does not present us with an immediately recognizable world. This is a film *driven by form*, but which does not naturalize form in order to make it an invisible component of the everyday.[18] Instead, the frame underscores the strangeness of that culture, and its lack of readability for the contemporary viewer.

Paintings work as an intertextual device of the mise-en-scene, adding up narrative layers (as *objets d'art* that function metonymically, as in the description of the houses of Mrs Manson Mingott or Ellen), but also pointing at the *reflexivity* of the gaze. As Lesley Stern has noted, the cinema of Scorsese (and *The Age of Innocence* is no exception) is all about bringing into being imaginary worlds and the rituals necessary to sustain them.[19] Desire becomes the motor of narration by way of a mobile camera and a specific syntactic feature that previously appeared in *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990): the Steadicam shot. When Newland enters the Beaufort mansion in the opening ball sequence, the long, weaving Steadicam shot maps out the space, producing the impression of familiarity, of the gaze that knows its way because it *makes* its way. However, the identification of vision with power is deceiving. Newland's fantasy of control is as precarious as the *tour de force* that presupposes the long Steadicam shot, which creates for a moment the illusion of an unending, non-sutured reality coming to life in front of our eyes.

Scorsese's film rewrites its literary referent via the masculine subjectivity that organizes the narrative space. The swerving camera both identifies with Newland's point of view and allows us to see more than he sees, whereas the literary voiceover – ironic instance of knowledge – opens up a gap between vision and meaning. In this conjuncture, the double framing produced by the use of paintings not only reconstructs this world, it relentlessly deconstructs it. For example, when Newland passes by the scandalous Bouguereau nude, the camera pans from his face to the painting and back again in such a way that his gaze seems to produce the object in view. There is no

16 Passion and restraint. Ian Christie talks with Martin Scorsese. *Sight and Sound* vol 3, no 2 (1994) pp 10–15, p 10

17 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Angel of devastation: Edith Wharton on the arts of the enslaved, in *No Man's Land: the Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Volume 2: Sexchanges* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 123.

18 I am using 'form' in a sense shared by Wharton's novel and Scorsese's film: not only in terms of the display of objects in the period film, but also their ability to function as signs. Films like *Howards End* (James Ivory, 1992) or *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) subordinate the display of form to the issues of class and gender that constitute the crux of those films. However, in *The Remains of the Day* (James Ivory, 1993), released around the same time as *The Age of Innocence*, the emphasis on form becomes part of the argument on emotional repression developed by the film.

19 Lesley Stern, *The Scorsese Connection* (London: British Film Institute, 1995) p. 226.

mark of suture: only a clean arch that binds together the fetish and the subject of the look. However, the pleasure in such voyeuristic power is a mere fabrication because, as the voiceover remarks 'the Beaufort house had been boldly planned' so as to make visitors confront the painting in their passage to the ballroom It is the house that constructs the viewer's look the objects interpellate the desiring subject, marking the path the gaze must pursue and not the other way round When Newland turns his back to the paintings in order to enter the ballroom, the camera lingers behind him Suddenly panning right, it zooms in on one of the canvases and holds this image for a split second before cutting to the ballroom, where it again takes up Newland's point of view. In a way, these are objects that *return the gaze*: the marks of the fundamental asymmetry of ideology.[20] As a result, the fantasy of the all-powerful desiring gaze is debunked from the outset.

The room is full of mirrors and paintings that seem to multiply the guests, and the moment of Newland's encounter with May is delayed so that the layering out of space in several planes permits a stretching of the basic narrative movement in the foreground against the background of changing *tableaux*. Let us take, for instance, the moment in which the camera slows down on Julius Beaufort. As he strolls by in the foreground, we see the waltzing couples behind him on a second plane, and a group of young women who sit and stand in the background under a huge canvas. This canvas, in turn, depicts a social scene similar to the ball that is taking place. The long shot in deep focus and the slowing down of the dancers' movements underscore the circularity of culture the women form a composition that reverts into the painting above them. The canvas thus functions as a mirror, but a mirror that absorbs the 'originals' and produces culturally coded reflections. This is a space that breaks with classical perspective, eliciting the anamorphic gaze that reveals the shadow of death in the mannerist stage reached by a world in crisis, as the narrator says, this is 'a world balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered by a whisper' When the self-inflections of culture become visible in simultaneity with the actual narrative, the double framing destroys the transparency of realism The idea of the 'original' has been cancelled out The cinematic apparatus has become an active agent of writing of the literary past, and the period film enters a stage in which we are no longer in the domain of the modernist showing, but rather in the regime of self-conscious *watching*.

In *The Age of Innocence* paintings are not just period decor, they become mediators of the literary memory in the text, driving the gaze and thus entering the subjective economy of the film. As films like *The Age of Innocence*, *The House of Mirth* or *The Golden Bowl* prove, much of the mannerism of contemporary adaptations has to do with the potential of the objects of the past to become powerful

20 See Jacques Lacan Of the gaze as *object petit a* in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London Vintage 1998), Slavoj Žižek *Looking Awry an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge MA and London MIT Press 1991), pp 125–8 and *The Fright of Real Tears Krzystof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London British Film Institute, 2001) ch 2

object-images of melodrama – including the female costumed body In this respect, the liaison between Newland Archer and the outsider, Ellen Olenska, develops as a true love story in the purest Lacanian sense: feminine subjectivity is conspicuously absent, and desire is triggered by a chain of partial objects A glove, a lost umbrella, a key; they all become replacements for the unreachable female body However, it is not only objects that feed the narrative of desire, but the filmic image itself Midway through the film, Newland finds Ellen alone on the pier of Lime Rock. This is his golden chance to make the gesture that can set them both free. Yet the static shot of Ellen on the pier destroys the reality effect: the long shot fuses actual perception with visual convention; this time, the frame itself turns into a canvas and Ellen becomes an auratic image – woman as work of art. A *tableau vivant* that inscribes memory as a reflection of the gaze, in the vocabulary of Gilles Deleuze this is a *crystal-image*: a time image with an actual and a virtual side that merge, marking a moment of coincidence of subject and object.[21] This double image expresses in visual terms the 'past-in-the-present-ness' that dominates the subjective mode of the film, where memory and loss, as Stern remarks, 'are inscribed within the circuit of desire within the palpability of the present'.[22]

> But the past had come again into the present, as in those newly discovered caverns in Tuscany, where children had lit bunches of straw and seen old images staring from the wall.[23]

The poignancy of this crystal-image resides in the fact that it produces the illusion of the past recovering its full potential. The literary image is converted into a film image by the boat that crosses the frame, (excruciatingly) inscribing time into what otherwise would essentially be a still photograph No obstacles whatsoever prevent Newland from approaching Ellen, and nevertheless he feels impelled to defer the moment of consummation once more by making a bet with himself: 'I'll go to her only if she turns around' This ultimate proof of romantic self-denial testifies to the relinquishment of the love object for the sake of the preservation of its image – an image that is already constructed as memory. After his wedding, Newland muses: 'As for the madness with Madame Olenska, Archer trained himself to remember it as the last of his discarded experiments. She remained in his memory simply as the most plaintive and poignant of a line of ghosts.' The actual possibility of fulfilment being already lost, Ellen (even her continuous travelling and intermittent presence during the film seem to prove so) remains a permanent *revenant*, looking at Newland from a different temporal dimension The bet that Newland makes with himself is, therefore, pointless. Like a good obsessive, Newland desires the encounter and defers the moment endlessly Ellen is not going to turn around because she has been given up already for the sake of preserving *her image* So this

21 Gilles Deleuze *Cinema 2 The Time-Image* trans Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis MN University of Minnesota Press 1989) p 69

22 Stern *The Scorsese Connection* p 224

23 Film dialogue from *The Age of Innocence*

particular frame not only makes a narrative point it carries a *punctum*, in the words of Roland Barthes, an element which rises from the scene, piercing the eye or, rather, *revealing* the eye-in-the-picture[24]. The digital matte shot thus works towards the effective inscription of the subject in the time-image. This is memory in the making.

At the core of the realist narrative, the filmic opens an essential ambiguity between subject and object, present and past. In the final sequence in Paris, Newland will at last make his true choice, by choosing loss over the lost object, he remains faithful to the true expression of his desire. Newland's memories of Ellen are condensed in the dream image of her silhouette at the pier, but in his imagination Ellen *does* turn: the moment has been corrected by time, even if she is the 'complete vision of all that he had missed' In this sense, Newland does not cling to the truth of his memories of Ellen, but to the truth of his *fantasies* of Ellen The ending in Wharton's novel is reproduced with detailed accuracy and yet, in the last moment, the frame is pierced by an image without referent in the literary intertext but which is authentically faithful to the subjective economy of the film: an invented memory, a closeup of Ellen turning on the pier, and smiling. The image (literally) inscribes its *punctum* the sunray that blinds Newland's eye triggers the truth that divides the frame, the accident that carries a hidden emotion.[25] The circle has closed This imaginary closeup not only rewrites Newland's past but the text of the past, suggesting a movement without resolution, a narration without ending [26]

24 Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida*, trans Richard Howard (London Vintage 1993) pp 26–7 The supplementary dimension given by the irruption of special effects in the realist narrative is, in a way that of the *industrial* punctum On postclassical cinema and the Barthesian notion of punctum see Jose Antonio Palao and Jimmy Entraigues, La industrialización del *punctum* efectos especiales y economia espectacular en el cine de James Cameron, *Archivos de la Filmoteca* no 34 (February 2000) pp 99–120

25 Barthes *Camera Lucida*

26 Stern, *The Scorsese Connection* p 227

The House of Mirth: time and the woman

Whereas *The Age of Innocence* exemplifies the fluid space of narrative desire and the metonymic drive of objects, Terence Davies sketches a different version of the same past in his transposition of *The House of Mirth*, an earlier novel by Edith Wharton (1902). Davies's film is a more austere, almost neoclassical example of the European literary film. The stasis that characterizes *The House of Mirth*, released in the UK in October 2000, poses a break from the emphasis on movement-images that dominates many of the literary films in the 1990s, from *Cyrano de Bergerac*[27] to *Elizabeth* Instead, the long takes and the slow pans enhance architectural spaces that are not only sumptuous, but self-consciously claustrophobic. As Philip Horne remarks, the sounds of the past become loudly apparent ticking clocks, closing doors, the lighting of cigarettes.[28] The so-called museum aesthetics of British heritage cinema may be on full display, but the effect is of an agent of estrangement

In this sense, *The House of Mirth* resembles Ivory's latest adaptation from Henry James *The Golden Bowl*, in which, not

27 See Julianne Pidduck Versions verse and verve Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990) in Ginette Vincendeau and Susan Hayward (eds) *French Film Texts and Contexts* second edition (London Routledge 2000)

28 Philip Horne 'Beauty s slow fade' *Sight and Sound* vol 10 no 10 (2000) pp 14–18 p 16

accidentally, the characters' dwellings and possessions form the crux of the plot However, *The House of Mirth* eschews symbolically loaded objects and uses them to express indirectly the conflicts and desires of its characters. In the first encounter of Lily Bart with Lawrence Selden at his bachelor flat, the growing intimacy in their conversation is deflated by Lily's apparently random question 'do you collect Americana?' The valuable but banal antiquarian books, which stand as an unmistakable sign of tradition that 'only the very rich can afford', open a detour in the scene that poignantly reveals the precariousness of Lily's position. Later in the film, she is seen fastidiously cutting open the pages of a volume with a knife It is an astonishingly literal image, which precedes Lily's desperate wielding of Americana as a weapon in order to ensnare a potential rich suitor, Percy Grice. Lily's circling around the commodities of the bourgeoisie, trying to get control over its signs, teems with the painful sense of the impossibility for a woman without means of accessing that closed social world as owner and agent of change. All she can hope for is to be bought into that world, as one more of its ornamental objects

However, although *The House of Mirth* is an exemplary instance of 'faithful' adaptation in its dramatic and iconic condensation of the text submitted to rewriting, the film's true play with the literary intertext emerges in the handling of its images. In this regard, two mirror moments in the film stand out: Lily's only time of (spectacular) glory, as model for a *tableau vivant* on the occasion of a wedding reception, and what I want to argue is the authentic *tableau* in the film In looking at these images, another Barthesian concept can be of help: what Barthes calls 'the third meaning' or the obtuse meaning.[29] In his analysis of several stills (although he could be talking of frames) from Einsenstein's films (in particular *Ivan the Terrible* [1944]), Barthes distinguishes an information meaning, a symbolic meaning, and the meaning that exceeds the operations of the sign, that is 'useless expenditure' 'The third meaning – theoretically locatable but not describable – can be seen as the *passage* from language to *signifiance* and the founding act of the filmic itself '[30] In short, Barthes alludes to the capacity of the image to escape the symbolic, to create another order of signification that can only be understood as difference, never as the object of discourse. Barthes adds: 'the obtuse meaning has something to do with disguise'. Interestingly enough, it is in his comments about Ivan's beard, the *punctum* in the frame that reveals Eisenstein's artifice ('falsification of itself – pastiche – and derisory fetish, since it shows its fissure and its suture'),[31] that an explicit connection with the literary film emerges Not surprisingly, one of the most successful attempts in recent times to rethink period drama has come from Stella Bruzzi, who locates the third meaning in 'the to-be-look-at-ness' of costume Bruzzi talks of a 'sexual model', in which

29 Roland Barthes, 'The third meaning Research notes on some Eisenstein stills', in *Image Music, Text*, trans Stephen Heath (New York Hill and Wang 1977)

30 Ibid p 65

31 Ibid p 58

clothes perform as active signifiers, signaling the shifts of identity rather than illustrating pre-established historical and psychological truths.[32] Costume is thus the fetish of period drama, it is what hides the body and stands in excess of it In this sense, the reinvention of the past always entails, in the words of Jean-Louis Comolli, 'a body too much'.[33] the coexistence of a body and its cultural disguise If adaptation is all about the adjustment of a body to a pre-existent image, it is when this body resists disappearing under an image that we have the feeling of disguise, of one skin covering another: a palimpsest.

In the film, there is a social gathering that fuses two different passages in the novel, the wedding of Lily's cousin (ch. 8) and a reception given by the Welly Brys (ch 12) The sequence contains Lily's participation in a series of *tableaux vivants*, where she appears dressed and framed as Watteau's *Summer* At any rate, the scene seeks the transfiguration of Gillian Anderson, who, for obvious reasons, is the televisual body-too-much in Davies's film, into the readerly body of Lily Bart. In more senses than one, we could say with Barthes that 'every body is a citation. of the already-written'.[34] Anderson's costumed body not only doubles Lily's beauty as high art, but it short-circuits the representation, bringing into it its own set of meanings,[35] transforming Lily into a writerly body.

However, the third sense of the image manifests in the dialectic between truth and disguise in Davies's film. The society described by Wharton is a theatre of appearances, where wealth is not merely the stuff on display, but the object of a careful mise-en-scene. In the novel, the highly staged scene of the *tableaux* discloses a moment of essential truth, realized in the eyes of Lawrence Selden:

> The unanimous 'Oh!' of the spectators was a tribute, not to the brush-work of Reynolds's 'Mrs Lloyd' but to the flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart. She had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself . . for the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart, divested of the trivialities of her little world, and catching for a moment a note of that eternal harmony of which her beauty was a part.[36]

The novel stresses Lily's appropriation of the painting and the symbiotic transparency of image and model The disguise paradoxically uncovers the truth, prefiguring a moment of emotion in Selden's sceptical eye However, there is a distracting element relating to the memory in the film text· Davies changes the painting: the film replaces one signifier with another. A reading of the scene concentrating on the symbolic would point out the fidelity to the 'spirit' of the novel This is, for example, Graham Fuller's reading. In his excellent review of the film, Fuller notes the suitability of the Watteau painting: 'It is an image of fecundity fulfilled, but with a

32 See especially Jane Campion costume drama and reclaiming women's past, in Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (eds) *Women and Film a Sight and Sound Reader* (London Scarlet Press 1996) and Bruzzi *Undressing Cinema*

33 Jean-Lous Comolli Historical fiction a body too much trans Ben Brewster, *Screen* vol 19 no 2 (1978) pp 41–53

34 Barthes *S/Z*, p 33 The *tableau* scene makes explicit Barthes s assertion that beauty is always already codified through the language of art (see section xvi Beauty)

35 On the topic of bodies in period drama see Julianne Pidduck *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love* screening the Elizabethans in Vincendeau (ed) *Film/Literature/Heritage*

36 Edith Wharton *The House of Mirth* (1905) (London Chancellor Press 1994), p 330

warning of summer's evanescence'[37] The painting describes Lily, who at the peak of her beauty and therefore of her (trading) powers is one step away from the beginning of decline As Fuller further points out, 'Lily's summer, unlike Watteau's, will remain unreaped' Her death as a virgin is thus anticipated

Yet where are the stasis and the pleasure in contemplation offered by the *tableau*? The frame does not dwell on this moment; on the contrary, Lily's full body is exposed only once (in a medium-long shot) for a split second before the curtains fall on her again. Knowing Davies's relish for the still image,[38] which is at the heart of his auteur reputation in contemporary British cinema, it is intriguing the way his classic adaptation represses the one scene in the literary referent that, *a priori*, might have appealed most to Davies *qua* interpreter. It is as if the image were afraid of revealing its own strangeness, and its best-kept secret: woman's costumed body as the ultimate period fetish The visualization of the scene has an unexpected effect it foregrounds the disguise, the impact of the theatrical and the masquerade of femininity. The excessive gendered body troubles the reality effect So the frame does not hold for long, and it yields nothing: one only has to compare it with the extended *tableau* on the pier used by Scorsese This is rather the photography without punctum, the disguise without emotion.

The absence of the *tableau* in the central *tableau* scene of *The House of Mirth* manifests its presence in a more eccentric way, however, as the hidden structure of feeling that filters the narrative. The closing of the adaptation, one of the key structural places where (as we have seen in *The Age of Innocence*) the memory of the literary concentrates, emerges as the moment in which the image reveals its intertext, inflecting the 'objective' realism of the narrative. Upon his discovery of Lily's corpse, Lawrence's first gesture is to roll up the blinds. The theatrical curtain goes up again and this time we get the true *tableau* in the film In the scene of Lily's death, the frame freezes and the film image dissolves into an *objet d'art*, representing the pathetic but aesthetically beautiful female corpse, complete with the man who mourns the loss. Lily Bart's death in oblivion is framed and dated as a painting of a distant past. The third sense arrests the melodramatic pathos of the narrative as a divide that cancels the identification effected by the codes of art, except as spectators of a past that was once thought familiar As in *The Age of Innocence*, in *The House of Mirth* the frame takes on the texture of the canvas at the very moment in which the death of female subjectivity signals the birth of memory Thus, by condensing the memory of the literary into an image, the literary film paradoxically reveals the fallacy of realism, or what Barthes calls the pre-eminence of the pictorial code in literary mimesis: 'realism . consists in copying not the real but a depicted copy of the real'[39] In its closing sequence, *The House of Mirth* betrays the transparency of

37 Graham Fuller Summer s end' *Film Comment*, vol 37 no 1 (2001) pp 54–9 p 56

38 Davies seems to share Barthes s passion for photographs as one of his best-known traits of style is the use of static shots that are held for so long that they seem to freeze into stills especially in his films *Distant Voices Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) See Phil Powrie On the threshold between past and present alternative heritage in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds) *British Cinema Past and Present* (London and New York Routledge 2000) pp 316–26 John Caughie Half way to paradise *Sight and Sound* vol 2 no 5 (1992) pp 11–13

39 Barthes *S/Z* p 55 (section xxiii Painting as a model)

adaptation, showing the operations of writing at the core of the readerly text.

Conclusion: rewriting the past

The Age of Innocence and *The House of Mirth* are examples of the contemporary mode of the literary film, where the modernist symbol has given way to the self-conscious use of its images. Whereas narrative mimesis remains the privileged locus of literary memory, the memory of the film located in the frame initiates alternative narratives where the feminine becomes the crux of rewriting. Indeed, one of the side effects of contemporary literary films is that they simultaneously deflect the attention from the problematic construction of femininity while actively putting woman's image to very sophisticated visual uses. Thus, whereas period drama has been accused of the feminization of History,[40] these films evidence the appropriation of the feminine by masculine directors. In both films, the excessive female body dissolves into citation, functioning as token of literary memory. Scorsese and Davies explore the past as a suffocating system of signs where woman's body is a ubiquitous object, an iconic sign that stands for many things – except, perhaps, for Woman.

40 See Pam Cook *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996) p. 77.

In most recent costume adaptations for cinema and television, gender has become the usual suspect: both the focus of reading strategies and the unresolved problem. Conversely, women filmmakers have used period drama as a way to rewrite women's history, but also to rewrite the figure of Modernism's masculine auteur. For instance, a film like *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), as Ken Gelder notes, 'attracted the kind of sustained analytical criticism which worked to designate it as "literary" even though it was not an adaptation'.[41] Framed by a European literary genealogy (from *Wuthering Heights* to *Madame Bovary*), the film seemed to call upon a myriad of literary references. Yet, unlike the two films examined above, *The Piano* does not have an actual literary intertext, but a cultural one: nineteenth-century colonialism and an almost Foucauldian take on Victorian sexuality. By reading its intertext through a metatext of displacement, which is both feminist and peripheral, the familiar imagery of Victorian culture is made strange. The piano, a well-defined cultural object, turns into an obtuse, unreadable image that disrupts closure by generating frames of interpretation. The film thus defamiliarizes apparently stable cultural constructions with its marginal politics of desire.

41 Ken Gelder 'Jane Campion and the limits of literary cinema' in Deborah Cartmel and Imelda Whelehan (eds) *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

In conclusion, the post-heritage literary film does not lend itself to reading so much from its centre (which can be the translation of the work that stands as the most visible intertext of the adaptation) as from its spaces of discursive difference. The literary film, with its

play on limits and boundaries of apparently reified texts, replicates the operation that Barthes conducts on Balzac's short story *Sarrasine*[42] The retelling of the intertext becomes, in the process, contaminated with references, transformed into the 'writerly'. *The Piano* is one of the most visible examples of a new kind of literary film that flouts the laws of heritage identification. It puts forward the fluidity of identity and the research, rather than the retrieval, of the past – but this process is also at work in *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*. With its loosening of the conventions of realism, the post-heritage literary film not only loses its specific national imagery (*Elizabeth* or *Bram Stoker's Dracula* present visible Oriental influences), but also troubles the 'past-as-present' mode, the alleged instrument of the fundamental denial of History in the heritage cycle The *literariness* of *The Age of Innocence, The House of Mirth, The Piano* and many other films comes across as the way they talk about their own images, about their time, about the relation of the contemporary psyche with the ideological frameworks that sustain those literary narratives or narratives of history. Thus, the contemporary period drama comes across as a continuum from the different intensities of classic adaptation – for example Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square* (1997) versus Iain Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* (1997) – to the disseminated traces of the literary in more heterogeneous, and transnational, reconstructions of the past, such as *The Piano, Artemisia* (Agnès Merlet, 1997), *Onegin* (Martha Fiennes, 1998), *The Governess* (Sandra Goldbacher, 1998), *A los que aman/Those Who Love* (Isabel Coixet, 1998) or *La Veuve de Saint-Pierre/The Widow of Saint-Pierre* (Patrice Leconte, 2000).

42 Barthes *S/Z*

Rather than looking for the trace of the literary in the 'sameness' of adaptation – the utopian horizon that works upon an essentially untranslatable memory – the adaptation operates in the *difference* of the literary film, understood in the Derridean sense, both as spatial *being-in-the-place-of-the-other* and as temporal deferral. The contemporary literary film can be made to work alongside much poststructuralist criticism, opening both its literary and filmic referents to the intricate and non-linear intertextual apparatus of contemporary culture. The use of the literary as difference in the practices of adaptation and rewriting serves to recontextualize the processes of literary memory as productive formations, rather than stable, 'readerly' objects that limit their intertext As a reading strategy in post-heritage criticism, the literary transcends the mode of mere replication into a productive mode that may account for the variety of reinventions of the past.

Modern Shakespeares in popular Bombay cinema: translation, subjectivity and community

ESHA NIYOGI DE

If postcolonial critics recognize that the spread of European education in the colonies taught non-western people to derive both their 'backward' pasts and their 'progressive' futures from European representations,[1] many also agree that indigenous students were less-than-faithful translators of canonical texts. Encounters between colonized peoples and modern Europe produced hybrid subjects and texts formed through the processes of 'selection, cutting, and mixing of cultural vocabularies'.[2] However, the question of where to place subjectivities in these mixings of cultures and influences – how to calibrate their command of or distance from indigenous knowledges – remains at the centre of postcolonial debates. Some critics point out that Homi Bhabha's influential notion of deconstructive hybridity is a 'response-oriented model' that only considers how subjects imitated or disrupted European modernity. It fails to illuminate the uneven ways that subjects claimed interpretive agency[3] and evaluated European texts from epistemic standpoints at odds with imperialist positions. In this essay, I demonstrate the importance of doing exactly this by examining the formation of hybrids in heterogeneous colonial and ex-colonial contexts where dominant culture criss-crossed with indigenous traditions and translocal flows of mass media. I show that cultural concepts and forms were transcribed in these multiple intersectionalities in ways that hybridized not merely European texts, but the very notion of translation as the derivation of European models

1 See Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

2 Ania Loomba, 'Local manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows": issues of race, hybridity and location in post-colonial Shakespeares', in Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (eds), *Post-colonial Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 146.

3 See Samadar Lavie, 'Blow-ups in the borderzones: third world Israeli authors' gropings for home', *New Formations*, vol. 18 (Winter 1992), p. 92; Homi Bhabha, 'Signs taken for wonders: questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, in *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 102–22.

This article examines the politics of importing British Shakespeares into the polycultural context of popular commercial Bombay cinema. Spawned from a theatrical tradition of Shakespeare adaptations in early twentieth-century Bombay, two Urdu films were produced in the late colonial and early independence periods. Sohrab Modi's *Hamlet alias Khoon ka Khoon* (1935), an adaptation of contemporary British stage productions of *Hamlet* (a few stills and other records survive from this); and Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954), a shot-by-shot reproduction of Laurence Olivier's 1948 adaptation. I argue that two disparate notions of intercultural transaction meet in these Shakespeare films, giving rise to a hybrid art of filmmaking. On the one hand, English-educated filmmakers and spectators were influenced by the western imperialist idea that reproductions of European texts in minor languages ought to enforce a displacement; this movement involves the transferring (Latin: *translatio*) of aesthetic expression out of a vernacular conceptual order and into that of the European original.[4] Assuming the modernity of all European cultural productions (regardless of historical period), colonial education stressed that by copying European texts colonial subjects were pursuing the course of progress defined by superior authors.[5] Imitations of canonical western Shakespeares were especially valuable for this pursuit. On the other hand, the filmmakers fell in with Bombay cinema's syncretistic culture that sought to reconcile familiar practices with new influences. In this culture, translation (Sanskrit: *anuvad*) was understood as an accretive process enabling collective authorship, an 'organic, ramifying, vegetative growth and renewal' of the original text in another 'verbal order and temporal space'.[6]

The syncretistic tradition stemmed from a long history of cultural exchanges within and across the borders of multilingual India.[7] It thrived in Bombay cinema through the characteristic mixing of representational modes in films drawing on the sensibilities of various unequally modernized constituencies of producers and consumers. Located in a heterogeneous urban commercial site, this film industry was 'under-capitaliz[ed]', it relied on merchant capital and had a fragmented production sector.[8] Different groups of contributors (for instance, traditional poets and workers skilled in the tools and codes of western films) 'pre-fabricated' the components,[9] and intermingled existing aesthetic forms with new ideologies of production and consumption. Moreover, these films catered to the medley of aesthetic and narrative 'attractions' and tastes in modern and indigenous visual culture brought to the screen by varied urban, cosmopolitan and rural audiences.[10] It was precisely the tradition of reconciling the cultures of a heterogeneous collectivity that led Bombay's popular Shakespeareans to combine available vocabularies of translation in their hybrid modern productions.

The Urdu Shakespeares that arose in this cultural and economic

4 See Niranjana *Siting Translation* p 8 Vincent L Rafael *Contracting Colonialism Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham NC Duke University Press 1993) pp xvii–xx

5 Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature 1800–1910* Volume 8 (New Delhi Sahitya Akademi 1991) especially pp 30–31, 46

6 Harish Trivedi and Susan Bassnett 'Introduction', in Harish Trivedi and Susan Bassnett (eds) *Post-colonial Translation Theory and Practice* (London Routledge 1999) p 10 Ganesh Devy Translation and literary history an Indian view in Trivedi and Bassnett (eds) *Post-colonial Translation* p 187 Trivedi and Bassnett note that the Sanskrit word for translation, which is retained by most modern Indian languages etymologically and primarily means saying after or again repeating by way of explanation"' The metaphor underlying the word is temporal and not spatial (p 9)

7 Das *A History of Indian Literature* p 24

8 See M Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film a Historical Construction* (Delhi Oxford University Press 2000) pp 38, 42

9 Ibid pp 43–5

10 See Ravi Vasudevan Shifting codes dissolving identities the Hindi social film of the 1950s as popular culture *Journal of Arts and Ideas* vols 23–24 (January 1993) Vasudevan stresses that a variety of attractions aesthetic/stylistic narrative/generic bind spectators to different types of cinema (p 56) He argues that Hindi films respond to the various attractions of their diverse spectators by mingling codes derived from Hollywood s continuity cinema with other codes more widely observable in the visual culture of [Indian] society (p 72)

conjuncture reveal how the accretive understanding of intercultural transaction negotiated the concept of displacement and its underlying imperialist myth of origins. In the obvious sense, they copied the British sources, and profited from the desire inculcated in English-educated producers and consumers to amass cultural capital. But in the imitations they also interwove traditional narrative and cinematic techniques. A close look at the Sahu film indicates, however, that its syncretistic attempt to reconcile disparate cultures of representation remained incomplete The film's logic of selection and alteration from the original demonstrates an awareness that aspects of Olivier's liberal-humanist interpretation of *Hamlet* – teleological action and masculinist individualism – could not be reconciled with a Bombay filmic version. This article demonstrates that cinematic imitations of canonical adaptations catalyzed epistemological negotiations between different understandings of how coherently to depict Shakespeare through the modern technological art of cinema. The filmmakers' attempts to reconcile contrasting world views bred a *reflexive awareness* of both the commonalities between the respective conceptual frameworks, and of their incommensurable differences This process of 'translation' mediated 'rival' ways of rationalizing on film the 'constants' of human existence such as the self, family, society, time, the cosmos, the good [11]

11 See Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1985) pp 145 125 For a discussion of how people s relations to the constants of human life change with the coming of modernity see also his Two theories of modernity *Public Culture* vol 27 no 1 (1999) especially pp 168–9

Theorizing the Bombay screen imitations, subjectivities, Shakespeares

While the Modi and Sahu films shared in the widespread Bombay performance practice of borrowing from western narrative and stylistic codes, they differed significantly. Hindi/Urdu cinema and its theatrical antecedents freely borrowed from successful Hollywood films and stage melodramas and their cinematic adaptations The notion of being faithful or giving explicit credit to a source was quite alien to this mainstream culture of imitation The Shakespeare films, in contrast, displayed signs of fidelity to canonical western sources, they revealed that a main 'attraction'[12] of Shakespeare on the Bombay screen or stage lay in recognizing a culturally valuable modern Shakespeare behind the copy Indeed, Sahu explicitly stated his intent of reproducing a famous western Shakespeare on the Hindi/Urdu screen.[13] By implication, he sought to rival the original and accrue symbolic capital in domestic and international elite cinema culture. The discourses surrounding these productions indicate that the Shakespeare films adopted, at least in part, a notion of translation-as-displacement with its underlying historicist narrative derived from colonial pedagogy and imperialist culture These contradictory discourses are not fully accounted for by prevailing assessments of Bombay cinema that emphasize its general proclivity for free and selective assimilation of western cultural forms.

12 See fn 9

13 Kishore Sahu My memorable roles , *Filmfare* (December 1967) p 23

Ravi Vasudevan notes that Bombay reproductions of Hollywood films habitually set up a 'relay' through borrowed and familiar narrative modes and attractive spectacles in the effort to incorporate 'something new in the field of the visual ... in a culturally intelligible .. address'.[14] Moreover, Ashish Rajadhyaksha demonstrates that these mutual accommodations and transformations between the popular and the modern date back to the period when new technologies and production modes were entering Indian visual culture and giving rise to 'vital interfaces' between 'traditional practices and modern economic genres'.[15] A consensus prevailing in Indian film studies is that this 'modern traditional' cinema involved the appropriation or rejection of the modern realist aesthetic in ways that reaffirmed the familiar.[16] Critics who make a somewhat different case for the relative autonomy of this indigenous film culture also acknowledge Bombay cinema's history of 'heterogeneous assimilation'.[17] Theoretical approaches that stress accommodation do not consider how this syncretistic film culture may have negotiated the imposition of western origins – central to cultural colonization and its after-effects – nor do they address how the underlying principle of reconciliation contradicted the western philosophy of translation

An exception to this line of argument is Ashis Nandy's emphasis on the decolonizing politics in commercial Indian cinema. He asserts that this cinema defies and unwittingly criticizes 'disturbing inputs from the modern West' that are imitated and 'endogenized' by the middle classes. The major flaw in Nandy's formulation is his depiction of commercial cinema as serving the autonomous cultural needs of (imaginary) premodern masses 'caught in the hinges of deculturation'. As Madhava Prasad rightly notes, he elides how mass production orchestrates the desires and conflicts of an evolving patriarchal nation-state What is important to retain from Nandy's account, however, is how Bombay cinema may mobilize an alternative 'cognitive order' that resists alien western concepts [18] It seems to me that in Hindi/Urdu genre films of the 1930s to the 1950s, narrative and stylistic codes were indeed linked in ways that combined native and foreign ideologies – for instance, bourgeois and feudal patriarchies, heterosexism, caste, class, communal biases – and often affirmed social conservatism But this interlinking of disparate codes and concepts of representation and spectatorship also brought about encounters between 'rival' cognitive orders In these encounters, the totalizing drive of imperialist transactions came to be contained in such a manner that conceptual dissimilarities were negotiated, and the incommensurable elements identified

Such juxtapositions of vernacular and modern modes of representation had connections with other traditions of cumulative composition and collective authoring. Village traditions of mythological performance and oral composition, re-tellings of the

14 Vasudevan Shifting codes p 63

15 See Ashish Rajadhyaksha The Phalke era conflict of traditional form and modern technology in Tejaswini Niranjana P Sudhir Vivek Dhareshwar (eds), *Interrogating Modernity Culture and Colonialism in India* (Calcutta Seagull Press 1993) pp 47–82

16 Prasad concludes in *Ideology of the Hindi Film* that Bombay cinema 'points in the direction of an active mobilization of the "familiar in the service of [the] hegemonic cultural project of defining the nation state (p 20) See also Sumita Chakravarty s extensive study of national identity formation in Bombay cinema *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema* (1993) (Delhi Oxford University Press, 1998) especially the chapter on the realist aesthetic (pp 80–118)

17 Rosie Thomas Indian cinema pleasures and popularity, *Screen*, vol 26 nos 3–4 (1985) p 130

18 Ashis Nandy, 'An intelligent critic s guide to Indian cinema in *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton NJ Princeton University Press 1995) pp 197 202–203 205 and Prasad *Ideology of the Hindi Film* pp 107–8

Hindu epics, popular religious rituals, and the translingual dissemination of folk tales are examples of traditions organic to the syncretistic process of cultural exchange in the multilingual subcontinent. Drawing in part from these traditions, Bombay cinema followed a system of working in new narrative and visual codes and performance styles without displacing pre-existing ones. Vijay Mishra aptly characterizes this structuring of collective memory as a 'palimpsest capable of endless expansion'. He suggests that, like a palimpsest, it always 'betray[ed] its compositional form' by making visible earlier inscriptions.[19] Both reflecting and transforming the producer's aesthetic strategies and spectatorial attractions, the pleasures of this popular commercial cinema arose in part from seeing a composite of disparate spectacles and cultural affirmations. This blending of satisfactions did not simply ensure the repetition of the familiar, a characteristic of 'the commodity production of consumer capitalism'.[20] It provided a way to process the new (emergent aesthetic forms and cognitive orders) and to re-view and potentially re-assess the familiar. In the Modi and Sahu films, this blend of pleasures and understandings resisted the imperialist notion of origins, and partially reconstructed subjectivities interpellated by that myth.

The films facilitated a unique sequence of 'transformations' in their subjects by adopting a dual strategy. Signs of 'original' Shakespeare productions appeared on screen, but these signs were simultaneously pried away from their signifieds and tied to familiar constellations of meaning. In this way, the films played to the colonial/anti-colonial desires of mimicry and rivalry, thereby 'managing' or repressing these anxieties (exactly as mass productions customarily do).[21] But they also led spectators through the mental activity of evaluating which aspects of the source texts could be reconciled with a culturally familiar ordering of stories, images, emotions – and which were incommensurable. Within and around ideological formations in these hybrid modern works, we see the growth of discerning interpretive communities of producers and spectators. These subjects were achieving (however unevenly) a form of agency denied by the centre–periphery world of the dominant West, a standpoint on the imperialist episteme. They were coming to know modern European texts from both inside and outside the interpellated subject position,[22] negotiating disjunctures in cognitive orders from a non-hierarchical perspective.

19 Vijay Mishra. Towards a theoretical critique of Bombay cinema'. *Screen* vol. 26, nos 3–4 (1985), pp. 134–5.

20 Fredric Jameson, Reification and utopia in mass culture. *Social Text* vol. 1 (Winter 1979), p. 135.

21 Ibid., p. 141.

22 See Sandra Harding's explanation of the relevance of Feminist Standpoint Epistemology to postcolonial studies in *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemology* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 149–50.

Canons, community and hybridity: Sohrab Modi's *Hamlet alias Khoon ka Khoon*

The records surviving from Modi's film give us a sense of how the work blended the desire to imitate canonical British stage *Hamlets*

with very different intellectual and affective appeals. Although these records are fragmented, they reveal some ways that the film may have diverged from the heterogeneous practices of its antecedents in the Parsi theatre and allied traditions. Through a close examination of these differences, and of the obvious similarities between the film and its predecessors, I piece together an account of the film's politics of translation. Renowned as the man who brought Shakespeare to the Indian screen, Parsi performer Modi made his film debut by screening his own stage hit, *Khoon ka Khoon* (literally 'blood for blood'), with the same cast.[23] The film's billboard named the eminent performers (Sohrab Modi, Naseem Banu, Shamshadbai) and, more generally, identified 'stars' embodying a specific performance culture with its own codes, values and aesthetic pleasures (figure 1). At the same time, this billboard showcases the appropriately costumed cast of a Victorian-stage-style Hamlet. The customary juxtaposition of English and Urdu titles on the billboard indicated that Modi had expanded his already eclectic repertoire (spectacular historicals, Victorian-style romantic melodramas) by including the canonical Shakespeare. This publicity implicitly assured viewers that the foreign materials were interwoven with familiar aesthetic pleasures. Slightly at odds with this semiotic thrust, however, was the insertion between the titles of 'alias', a word connoting to the English-

23 Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen (eds), *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 246

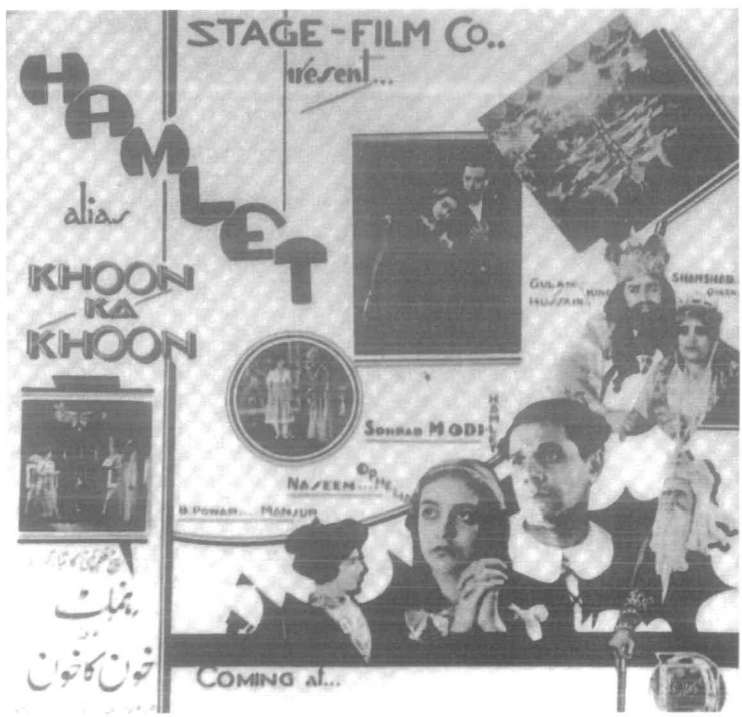

Fig. 1
Picture courtesy: The Indian Film Archive.

educated the Urdu film's secondary status in relation to a European model.

The stills surviving from the film (figures 2–3) confirm that Modi did make some attempt to copy faithfully from western originals. Figure two shows Modi imitating the canonical pensive pose of Hamlet, probably delivering a soliloquy similar to those delivered on the English stage by performers such as John Gielgud. Figure three presents an accurate copy of a Gonzago play set. In this scene, Ophelia, who in Gielgud's version would have been holding Hamlet's head in her lap at this moment, is absent probably because social decorum prohibited an upper-class/caste woman from publicly consorting with a man. More importantly, Modi's imitation of a canonical portrayal of Hamlet's interiority (figure 2) appealed to a culturally competent perspective. Such an educated eye would have valued the symbolic capital arising from a modern-subject-centred psychological drama in accordance with elite European theatre conventions. The film was produced by the Stage Film company, established the same year by Modi and his brother in order to extend their stage successes into film. *Hamlet* closely follows the stage version, as it is known to have 'won acclaim mostly for the qualities of the play, especially the Urdu dialogue'.[24] However, the perspectival frame in figure two suggests that the camera allowed a degree of control over visual codes unavailable within the relative multiplicity of performative styles and points of view in a heterogeneous Parsi production. In general, the history of adapting

24 Ibid., pp. 246, 140

Fig. 2
Picture courtesy: The Indian Film Archive.

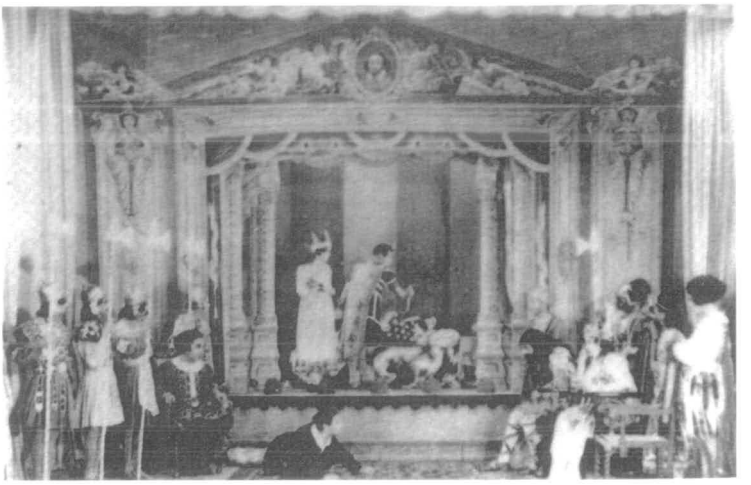

Fig. 3
Picture courtesy:
The Indian Film Archive.

Shakespeare plays to film records a considerable 'narrow[ing]' of the relative plurality of perspectives available in stage performances.[25] In this light, it is significant that a contemporary review of the film noted that 'Modi's performance [and presence] so dominated the film that the "other characters [did] not matter much"'.[26]

This evidence suggests that the film registers the effects of colonial pedagogy and its complex racialized context. In elite schools and colleges of the period, Shakespeare lessons were accompanied by student performances before the judgmental eyes of British drama teachers and critics. These grounds bred native Shakespeareans' contradictory desires to mimic (or identify with) and rival British models. Such competing desires were further complicated by a racialized scopic hierarchy – an irreversible division between those who looked and judged, and those who were displayed struggling to be more like their models. The film was responding to these forms of domination on at least two fronts. The centred image of Shakespeare above the stage suggests that Modi played to the surveying eye of the original English author, although the centring is probably more obvious in this photograph than it would have been in a live performance (figure 3). To this imperial gaze, Modi demonstrates an ability to discipline his body and performance to the degree that he becomes the exact copy of a canonical white actor. Playing also to the anxiety of the English-educated to seize control of the scopic hierarchy, Modi is masquerading as an Indian Gielgud to satisfy native eyes. These signs indicate that the film was responding to western influence from an interpellated position. Yet, the film's similarity to the stage hit and its commercial success mark a cultural position that exceeds interpellation, reaffirming that the foreign Shakespeare was being assessed in relation to familiar

25 Catherine Belsey, 'Shakespeare on film: a question of perspective', *Literature and Film Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1993), p. 152.

26 Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopedia*, p. 246.

forms and concepts To explore how the film might have achieved consonance between its various borrowed and indigenous signifiers, or discerned what was dissonant, we must see it in the light of Parsi traditions of syncretistic composition and collective authorship

Spearheaded by the cosmopolitan Parsis who had acquired wealth and prominence through modern business enterprises and western education, this theatre was an important channel through which translocal influences (Victorian melodrama, Shakespeare and seventeenth-century British drama, non-western oral traditions such as Persian folktales) flowed into Indian performance traditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the dramatic tradition had originated in the colonial academy, its producers and performers soon undertook commercial ventures, becoming attentive to popular tastes[27] Commercial Parsi drama was a principal predecessor of the mixed-mode Hindi/Urdu film. It provided a simultaneity of familiar and innovative pleasures, but also ensured that viewers looked back at a culturally familiar performance through new inscriptions. In this theatrical setting as in the film industry, productions brought together the cultural knowledges of a community of unequally modernized producers and spectators. In the play *Khoon ka Khoon*, for example, Modi – the cosmopolitan English-educated son of a civil servant who also performed to small-town audiences – collaborated with writer Mehdi Ahsan, a traditional Urdu storyteller and scriptwriter.[28] What most appealed to these collectives of producers and shaped their general strategies for adapting European materials were not the canons of high art but commercially produced Victorian melodrama. Drawing on this transitional modern strand of western theatre,[29] they developed strategies for incorporating European aesthetic conventions into local performance and artistic traditions

Parsi producers interested in packaging marketable products were attracted to Victorian melodramas for their sensational spectacles that included sophisticated stage machinery, dazzling costumes and fancy advertising techniques. All of these were elements of a 'culture of the visible' that spanned nineteenth-century theatre and cinema of the twentieth century[30] What also made these productions particularly accessible was melodrama's blending of 'sacred and hierarchical [with] . . post-sacred' world views.[31] Typically, melodrama combines somewhat contradictory styles of representation: on the one hand, Aristotelian plots (with causal links and linear action) are presented with a modern realist emphasis on individual characters as points of cohesion for various discursive strands; on the other hand, these productions include many contrived sequences full of coincidences and affective appeals, notably the use of music to orchestrate emotions[32] In this way, realist portrayals of individuated characters become metaphors for 'primal conflicts and desires' and 'latent moral

27 Ibid, pp 159–60 Das *A History of Indian Literature* pp 183–4

28 Ibid, p 246

29 Vasudevan Shifting codes, pp 72–3

30 Ravi Vasudevan, 'The melodramatic mode and the commercial Hindi cinema *Screen* vol 30 no 3 (1989) p 31 Vasudevan draws on Christine Gledhill's study of melodrama These new devices were interwoven into pre-existing ones of stage setting and backdrop design (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen *Encyclopedia* p 205)

31 Vasudevan Shifting codes p 73

32 Steve Neale *Genre* (London British Film Institute 1980) pp 25 30, Thomas Elsaesser Tales of sound and fury observations on the family melodrama in Bill Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods* Volume 2 (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1985) p 167

meanings'.[33] Parsi producers in their turn emphasized the metaphorical dimension, tailoring these works to a largely non-mimetic system of representation.

Rooted in the Sanskrit aesthetical philosophy of the *rasasuthra*, this non-mimetic order of art permeated Indian popular performance traditions and related representational practices in visual culture Along these lines, Parsi adaptations of melodrama used sensational spectacles and typecast characters expressing patterned emotions to achieve an 'ordered succession of modes of affect (*rasa*)' and a unified moral experience Through this balancing of depersonalized affects they were, in accordance with the *rasasuthra* theory, 'restat[ing] a more permanent .. mode of being than that which . constitut[ed] the framework of contingent existence'.[34] To heighten the affective appeal, the narratives were interspersed with many non-diegetic scenes such as songs and dances Such digressions from the linear storyline reveal that these productions were layered with oral storytelling practices, allowing for 'asides, stories within stories, interposed political, social . commentary and the like'.[35] To reconcile a European-style presentation of narrative temporality characteristic of the proscenium theatre, moreover, Parsi actors punctuated the linear flow with a frontal address. That is, they did away with the intrusive fourth wall and displayed themselves directly to viewers.[36] The technique of frontality derived from depictions of iconic presence related to the 'discourse of universal configuration' in Indian art, and persisted on the Hindi/Urdu screen. Images arising from 'archaic or contemporary' myths often had a static frontal orientation, 'enclosing meaning within their frame, and ignoring the offscreen as a site of reference'.[37]

Thus, Parsi producers followed a general strategy of combining diverse practices of performance and narration This process also led them to alter significantly the conceptual assumptions underlying narrative and visual codes borrowed from modern British stage productions (whether melodramas or Shakespeare). Considering a Parsi Shakespeare play in line with allied community-based projects of Shakespeare adaptation, we get a sense that these alterations involved changing the very ways in which the 'constants' of human existence were being conceptualized in performance It was Modi's contemporary and rival Cowasji Khatau's production that popularized *Hamlet* on the Parsi stage This production retained only the skeleton of the plot and loaded on sentimental love intrigues and many digressive song-and-dance sequences. The story was rewritten to centre on Ophelia and her female companion, each with several suitors who also fight with one another, one of Ophelia's suitors is murdered by Hamlet at the graveyard. The mad Ophelia's life ends with a thrilling spectacle unimaginable in an Aristotelian reading of the play she jumps off a bridge into the sea![38] This free style of assimilating a Shakespeare plot into a few recognizable emotions,

33 Vasudevan, Shifting codes p 73 Peter Brooks quoted in *ibid*, p 73

34 Thomas Indian cinema pleasures and popularity p 130 Dimock et al *The Literatures of India an Introduction* (Chicago IL University of Chicago Press 1974) p 226

35 Chakravarty *National Identity* p 85

36 A Kapur quoted in Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* p 19

37 Vasudevan, 'Shifting codes, p 61

38 Described by R K Yajnik *The Indian Theatre its Origins and its Later Developments Under European Influence* (New York Haskell House 1970) pp 160–61

sensations, themes and aesthetic conventions did not stand alone in this period It overlapped with other popular strands, notably the *naua khel* or 'new entertainment' traditions that thrived in inexpensive Urdu, Hindi, Marathi and Gujarathi theatres of the early twentieth century. These fast-paced performances were tailored by professional poets (*kavis*) and theatre managers to suit the tastes of mostly working-class and migrant rural people, whose numbers were growing apace in rapidly urbanizing Bombay.[39]

The Parsi theatre's technique for altering or accenting the conceptual frameworks of plots showed a few distinctive patterns Firstly, they invariably emphasized the centrality of 'good' women and often renamed the plays after them (*Macbeth* was retitled *Vasundhara* after Lady Macbeth, and *Othello* became *Kamlata*, Desdemona's name in the Gujarathi play) Accenting the maternal traits and legitimate romantic passion of women in conjugal relationships,[40] the plays depicted such women as the upholders of the heterosexual social order A driving force of these portrayals was the Hindu ethical code in which female sexuality is auspicious – the source of women's powers of giving and nurturing life and thus regenerating the earth and, 'by metaphorical extension, the cosmos'.[41] Secondly, these portrayals of the social good (probably combining homegrown patriarchal, heterosexist and caste biases with Victorian influences) were contained in the larger reaffirmation of a vision of good and evil that transcended the temporality of human existence This vision produced happy endings to even the darkest Shakespearean tragedies and, moreover, posed a sharp contrast with the latter's dualistic Judaeo-Christian framework Good and evil were conceived in terms not of the ethical individual and his culpable or criminalized other, but of a cosmic play of *pravritti* (worldliness) and *nivritti* (renunciation) resulting in the return of misguided human beings to the revealed path of *dharma* (religious law) [42] A striking rejection of Shakespearean tragic dualism appeared, for instance, in *Othello/Kamlata*'s reinterpretation of Iago as an innocuous rogue and buffoon whose machinations were foiled by a coincidence that reunited Othello with Desdemona.[43] Thirdly, influenced by the cosmic discourse pervading literary, performance and artistic traditions of the subcontinent, this rejection of the self/other dichotomy drew from a fundamental difference in cultural notions of personhood Indigenous conceptions of the 'dividual' or divisible self – permeable by cosmic, social and psychic, and physical flows – were distinguished from the western-bounded individual.[44]

If Modi's film version of his play falls in with this syncretistic practice of Shakespeare adaptation, however, it also partially diverges. As I discuss above, it attempts to faithfully reproduce a bourgeois western canon even while displacing the familiar code of visual interpretation. The perspectival shot that centres and psychologizes the individual on and off the screen (figure 2), for

39 Details of these performances derive from C J Sisson *Shakespeare in India Popular Adaptations on the Bombay Stage* (London Oxford University Press, 1926)

40 In the main religious traditions that have prevailed over social arrangements in India (Hindu Islamic Buddhist) the heterosexual patriarchal family has been considered the legitimate sphere of sexual activity See Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (eds) *Same Sex Love in India Readings from Literature and History* (New York St Martin s Press 2000) pp 22 24–26 124 199–200

41 See Frederique Apffel Marglin Female sexuality in the Hindu world in Clarrisa W Atkinson C H Buchannan and M R Miles (eds) *Immaculate and Powerful the Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston MA Beacon Press 1985) pp 46 54

42 See Mishra Towards a theoretical critique of Bombay cinema p 139 Chakravarty s discussion of Bombay films in the light of Mishra's theory in *National Identity* pp 105–10

43 Described in Ranjee G Shahani *Shakespeare Through Eastern Eyes* (London Herbert Joseph 1932) pp 62–3

44 McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden Toward an ethnosociology of South Asian caste systems in Kenneth David (ed) *The New Wind Changing Identities in South Asia* (The Hague Mouton Publishers 1977) pp 227–38

example, is strikingly at odds with an aesthetic order foregrounding the cosmic dimension of human existence portrayed through frontality The film's commercial success suggests, however, that like other Parsi productions it inscribed a temporal understanding of cultural exchange – the sharing of disparate knowledges of performance and art between heterogeneous constituencies of producers and spectators (foreign and indigenous). Therefore it seems to me, upon considering the fragmented records of the film, that the film's attraction arises from a composite of hybrid satisfactions. It pointedly plays up the eroticism in Modi's stylized mimicry of original spectacles, and thereby excites and gratifies both the narcissistic desires and competing scopic drives of interpellated subjects. Simultaneously, it mixes and contrasts these pleasures with very different emotions and conceptual patterns In this way, the pleasures derived from mimicking and rivaling canonical Shakespeares are minimized in an overarching balance of appeals that reiterates a unified moral experience The success of the film in this syncretistic context suggests that the cultural hierarchy indexed by 'alias' on the billboard had given way to a largely conciliatory connection between different filmic versions of *Hamlet* – and, more generally, between disparate ways of thinking intercultural transaction. Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet*, which I describe below, reveals that underlying this conciliatory approach was a reflexive consciousness about which aspects of the European model could be integrated into an indigenous aesthetic and world view, and which were incommensurable and had to be set aside.

Translation and reflexivity in film: the *Hamlet*s of Kishore Sahu and Laurence Olivier

When Kishore Sahu produced his 1954 shot-by-shot imitation of Olivier's *Hamlet*, Indian cinema's relations with western canons of art had changed from the colonial period in at least two significant ways. Firstly, in independent India and a fast-decolonizing world, there was a growing perception that in principle these canons were relatively open and egalitarian If equipped with the right kinds of knowledge, technology and resources, filmmakers of all races and nations could produce 'world-class' cinema Hollywood and European films had for years been freely accessible to Indians when India as a nation entered the international art cinema circuit by hosting its first International Film Festival in 1952 This festival added Italian neorealism to the international cultural capital aspired to by Indian filmmakers. What this meant, ironically enough, was that the criteria for valuable world cinema were still, even in a decolonized context, being determined by bourgeois western models such as art and literary films, and a 'refined version of the

Hollywood norm'.[45] Secondly, the homogenizing trends of an emerging elitist national culture tended to impose these models – notably, the pivotal code of realism – on the indigenous cinemas that had arisen in Bombay and other regions of India. Within this international cultural hierarchy, the latter were found lacking. Fueled by the Nehruvian agenda of national socioeconomic progress led by western-educated bourgeois individuals, a norm-setting discourse about Indian cinema arose both outside and within commercial film circles These discourses influenced the practice of art filmmakers and critics (several associated with the Calcutta Film Society) as well as some Bombay film producers and performers.[46] It was in this context that Kishore Sahu joined in with elitist voices and expressed his intent to produce work that would rise above low-brow film to the stature of canonical modern cinema.

Sahu was a minor film star with a BA in English Literature acquired in the colonial period He is known as an 'early instance of a total author', an actor, director and scriptwriter with a persistent interest in the European classics.[47] Writing in *Filmfare*, a magazine that 'strove for a sophisticated image . by covering a broad spectrum of topics of interest to educated readers',[48] Sahu explicitly measured commercial filmmakers and spectators against a normative rationality. He commented that 'intelligent picturegoers remark that all heroes [and villains] of Hindi pictures are stereotyped' Stressing that films in which characters unaccountably broke into lusty songs were infantile, he proclaimed that an artiste such as he found 'small pleasure in filling the conventional roles allotted in a Hindi picture' Later he reiterated that his lifelong ambition to model his own performance on the 'realistic [and] . complex characters' of western films had been realized in his 'daring venture into the role of Hamlet'.[49] No doubt to ensure the accurate reproduction of Olivier's internationally acclaimed adaptation, Sahu also recruited a professor of English Literature, B.D. Verma, as one of the scriptwriters. On closer examination however, this commercial production demonstrates how the 'ideological mission' of homogenizing Indian cinema along the lines of western models was partially decentred through a fragmented mode of production For here, a 'patchwork' of unequally modern concepts, ideologies, and consumerist attractions held sway and accrued profit.[50]

Hamlet was produced by Sahu's own company, Hindustan Chitra (established in 1944) This company belonged to the Filmistan collective of studios that regulated an all-Indian marketplace of films in the early post-independence period.[51] Attentive to the market, the production brought Sahu and Verma together with an array of collaborators from diverse literary, performative and artistic legacies In effect, this company inserted Olivier's Shakespeare into a familiar discursive field of popular film, performance and art Urdu writer Amant Hilal co-scripted the play and traditional lyricist Hasrat

45 Vasudevan Shifting codes p 57

46 Ibid, pp 56–60 Chakravarty, *National Identity* p 88

47 Rajadhyaksha and Willemen *Encyclopedia*, p 188

48 Chakravarty *National Identity* p 69

49 Sahu Complex character roles *Filmfare* (11 July 1952) p 23 My memorable roles p 23

50 Prasad *Ideology of the Hindi Film* p 32

51 Rajadhyaksha and Willemen *Encyclopedia* p 91

Jaipuri wrote the songs. Moreover, rising Hindi and Bengali star Mala Sinha was cast in the lead role of Ophelia and hit playback singers like Asha Bhonsle and Mohammed Rafi were recruited to perform generic songs. Beyond tailoring the production to his immediate context, Sahu doubtless drew on the Parsi Shakespeare traditions and, especially, his predecessor Modi's reknowned *Hamlet*, for it was customary for Bombay directors to borrow not only from western sources but from one another's successful reproductions of these. This meant that Sahu's dominant intention in making *Hamlet* was refracted by the heteroglossia of Parsi performances and their diverse authorship.[52] The product that arose from this effective collaboration between multiple communities of authors (present and past, foreign and indigenous) was a hybrid of a particular kind. Not only did it bring together and contrast different cultural logics of audiovisual narrativity,[53] it contained a germinal reflection about how to translate the conceptual framework of the canonical European text. Before investigating how this reflexive hybridization unfolded on the Sahu screen, I will briefly examine the epistemology underlying its source, Olivier's *Hamlet*.

Olivier's adaptation of *Hamlet* stands out as an apotheosis of canonical Shakespeare cinema. Spawned from nineteenth-century illusionist drama and liberal humanist filmmaking, it successfully narrows down the possible interpretations of the play to a linear narrative explanation. The use of continuity editing implies to the 'preferred' spectator ('like-minded men') that the tightly-knit narrative constitutes the one and only meaning of Shakespeare's text. Moreover, the cultural prestige of Olivier's 'quality' production[54] deploys an auteurist discourse where a meaning that had originated in the author's expression of life experience is being reproduced by a competent interpreter. In this cultural framework, individual subjectivity is seen as the origin of thought and action.[55] Olivier's *Hamlet* ranked high in the order of adaptations because it provided, through meticulous spatial ordering of the text and alterations in the dialogue, a logical account of Shakespeare's most ambiguous work (justifying the alterations, Olivier called his piece 'an essay on *Hamlet*').[56] The film was responding to critics who had questioned the 'believability' of Olivier's 1937 portrayal on stage of Hamlet's delay in taking revenge for his father's murder.[57] Olivier uses tracking shots, long takes, and deep focus to consolidate narrative continuity and flow.[58] The flow is controlled by the 'independent, restless, omniscient, sometimes voyeuristic eye of a strong, distinct personality'.[59] To emphasize omniscience, Olivier omits passages that reveal either ambiguities in the plot or the inability of the Shakespearean characters to be in control. A noteworthy example of the latter is the deletion of Horatio's speech on the 'unnatural acts', 'accidental judgments', and 'purposes mistook' characterizing the events at Elsinore.[60] The work affirms the Freudian reading that

52 See Mikhail Bakhtin in Michael Holoquist (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holoquist (Austin TX: University of Texas Press 1981) p. 324.

53 I thank Julianne Pidduck for alerting me to the audio aspect of the narratives.

54 See John Caughie *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 216–18.

55 Belsey 'Shakespeare on film' pp. 154–6.

56 Bernice Kliman *Hamlet: Film, Television, and Audio Performance* (Rutherford: Associated Universities Press, 1988) pp. 23, 29–30.

57 Olivier had performed at the Old Vic under Tyrone Guthrie's direction. See Mary Maher *Modern Hamlets and their Soliloquies* (Iowa, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1992) p. 29.

58 Anthony Davies *Filming Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Cambridge, 1988) p. 45.

59 Quoted in ibid. p. 44.

60 *Hamlet* Act V, sc. ii, ll. 380–85. Quotations derive from the *Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

Hamlet vicariously confronts his own repressed desires through Claudius's actions, but adds a slightly different inflection. Olivier emphasizes not so much Hamlet's guilt but the tragedy of a 'grandiose self' with its unmet need for 'context and validation'.[61]

61 Peter Donaldson *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990) pp. 62–3.

At the core of Kishore Sahu's cinematic model, then, was the eye of a liberal humanist director-performer piecing together an all-encompassing male subject from the uncertainties of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The work of translating the film into the Urdu composition proceeds along three trajectories. On one level, the Urdu film presents a fairly coherent imitation by copying the majority of Olivier's shots in approximately the same order. This imitation gratifies the bourgeois Indian subject's rivalry with world-class cinema by configuring a canonical Shakespeare on the national screen. In the process, the aspiring rational citizen–spectator is interpellated into the scientific order of sights and sounds of Olivier's explanation. (Figure 4, showing Sahu as Hamlet, indicates how closely costumes were copied.) Through Sahu's stylized and meticulous mimicry of Olivier's poses, however, the film also satisfies the narcissistic desire of Sahu's preferred spectator, the elite Indian man, to be the same as the canonical male subject of western art, thereby repressing the anxiety that he was always only a copy,

Fig. 4
Picture courtesy: The Indian Film Archive.

even under decolonized conditions. At the same time, the Urdu film changes camera angles and selectively rearranges or interpolates mise-en-scene and dialogue. This reworking significantly recodes Olivier's project to reconcile the play with a moral framework at odds with the western subject-centred explanation Invoking structures of affect and themes familiar to popular Shakespeares, Sahu accommodates *Hamlet* in a family-centred political drama.[62] Between these two accounts of *Hamlet* is a third level of interrogation – a germinal reflection on which aspects of the source text cannot be assimilated into the familiar framework and have to be left out as foreign conceptual oddities. To elaborate on the hybrid and reflexive translation practice in this film, I begin with the roles played by the two female figures

62 Chakravarty suggests that in Hindi films of the 1950s there was a strong emphasis on myth based political dramas 'Mythic figures of authority represent[ed] a unifying force in social life [and] resolution [came] through the reconciliation of state authority with more traditional centers of allegiance such as the family *National Identity* p 120

In Sahu's *Hamlet*, Ophelia becomes a principal agent for restoring family and social relationships and, in effect, moral and political order in Denmark. The Urdu film draws on Olivier's portrayal of a hyperfeminine Ophelia but culturally recodes femininity to depict how this central female character mediates between men and pacifies their adversarial passions. Underscoring Ophelia's legitimate and auspicious romantic love and libidinal energy, it shows Mala Sinha to be far more aggressive than Jean Simmons, Olivier's Ophelia, in expressing herself to Sahu/Hamlet Through this recoding, Olivier's idea of the feminine as the 'other' outside and below the dominant male individual is revealed to be incommensurate with an indigenous femininity For instance, in one shot Olivier places the camera behind Hamlet's shoulder for a deep-focus shot of Ophelia framed by bay doors. By using deep focus to produce an impression of 'distance in depth' and the 'two-dimensional completeness of painting',[63] he evokes a visual metaphor of the relationship between Hamlet/Olivier (male protagonist and director) and Ophelia/Simmons (female character and actress) as one between sovereign subject and passive object. Moreover, the previous shot had established the patriarchal ideology beneath this unequal positioning and its teleology. It placed Ophelia between the desiring gaze of Hamlet and the censorious eyes of her father, implying that she was the pawn in a power-battle between the men. Sahu's film meticulously imitates the details of costume, prop and camera placement to show Sahu sitting like Olivier with leg outstretched in an identical chair and looking through the bay doors at Ophelia In this way, it not only plays to the narcissistic desires of the performer and spectators, but also reproduces Olivier's masculinist gaze However, the following scenes indicate that Olivier's depiction of subject–object relations is at odds with the Urdu film's treatment of the Hamlet–Ophelia relationship.

63 Davies *Filming Shakespeare s Plays* pp 48–9

In stark contrast to Olivier's film, the Urdu version interrupts the deep-focus shot, as Ophelia breaks out of the prisonhouse of bay doors (and implicitly the male protagonist's voyeuristic gaze) and

approaches Hamlet to remind him of his love vows. This love scene is inserted into the narrative through a flashback sequence that interpolates into the flow of the human drama the cosmic dimension of Ophelia's regenerative powers. The flashback shows Ophelia and her female companions dancing around a fountain with a lovelorn Hamlet gazing upon them from beneath a tree. The dance is accompanied by a dubbed song with a strong amorous appeal fittingly performed by Asha Bhonsle ('*Ankhon me pyar mera*'/'I have love in my eyes'). The scene closes with Hamlet revealing himself to Ophelia to lock her in a tender embrace (figure 5). The frontal presentation of the non-diegetic song-and-dance spectacle accents this performance with the divine erotica seen in popular representations of Hindu mythology in art and performance. The spectacle conceptually recodes Ophelia and Hamlet (who are, on the surface, still the figures of the Olivier narrative) into iconic images of the mortal Radha consorting with the divine Krishna surrounded by *sakhis* (female companions). Further, rather than closeups that dissect such an image and centre the individual subject on and off the screen, the entire flashback uses medium-shots to present an integral image of community. It conveys the symbolic message that the cosmic and psycho-social forces of the good woman's love flow

Fig. 5
Picture courtesy: The Indian Film Archive.

through the (dividual) man frayed by adversarial and destructive masculinity. In reconnecting the female and male in an auspicious relationship that promises to breed new life, this sequence symbolically rejuvenates the community and the earth The dance itself does momentarily lose its frontal aspect when shot from Hamlet's point of view that fetishizes the female body to voyeuristic eyes on and off the screen. Simultaneously, however, the idealistic dimension of the flashback functions to reconcile the Hamlet–Ophelia narrative with a cognitive order strikingly at odds with Olivier's male-sovereign-individualist one. In effect, this symbolic negotiation interrogates the epistemic viability of that interpretation

The flashback lays the groundwork for the nunnery scene's more detailed account of why Olivier's conceptual assumptions are incommensurate with an Urdu *Hamlet*. The nunnery scene once again broadly follows Olivier's composition of frames, but dialogues are significantly altered. Invoking the good woman's moral capacity to renounce the world, Sahu/Hamlet repeatedly urges Ophelia to withdraw from a material world surfeiting with sins born of *pravritti* and retreat into a 'poorhouse' (*garib-khana*) to immerse herself in prayer (*khuda ke namaaz karo*). Gazing with a misogynist Cartesian eye on the tainted Judaeo-Christian world of original sin and its construction of impure female sexuality, Olivier emphasizes Hamlet's view that Ophelia has a propensity to be a 'breeder of sinners'. In contrast, working from a moral episteme that views woman as a potentially sacred mother, the Urdu work strips Ophelia of the connotations of wily and foul sexuality, and recodes her beauty (the outward *hasina* appearance of the good woman) with virtue. Through this recoding, the film situates Ophelia in another, equally inflexible, heterosexual patriarchal order. But the recoding also indicates that Olivier's misogynist reading, and the underlying dualistic conceptualization of the good, is illogical to a Bombay film audience

In the Urdu work, then, Ophelia becomes the symbolic enabler of the male Indian filmmaker's critique of Olivier's secular space and centred, sovereign male subject The portrayal of Ophelia indicates that the Urdu representation connects with some aspects of Olivier's film but leaves out others as the conceptual 'residue' of this cross-cultural exchange Thus, Ophelia also becomes the catalyst for reconfiguring on screen forces enabling moral stability in the family, society and state. Through his relationship with Ophelia, Polonius emerges with enhanced fatherliness Although he uses his daughter's sexuality to bait an adversary, his scheming nature is ultimately reconciled with the symbolic guardian of the 'child' (*bachchi*) Ophelia, and of course, her procreative powers Likewise, Laertes turns from the avenger of family wrongs into more of a protective elder brother. When he first witnesses the mad Ophelia, rather than striking out for vengeance (like his western counterpart), Laertes darts across the room to lock his sister in an emotional embrace.

Even the minor male character, Horatio, in an interpolated scene, tenderly guides the demented Ophelia back into the protective sanctuary of her home. Mala Sinha's performance of Ophelia and the response of the characters around her facilitate an alternative metaphorical significance These subtle but significant alterations in the translation reveal a reflexive understanding of the conceptual gaps between the canonical British representation and its cultural appropriation In this respect, Ophelia's part in the film overlaps with Gertrude's.

Gertrude, the pivot of Olivier's Freudian reading, is reflexively portrayed in the Urdu film as a misfit both in her role of the promiscuous adulteress and for the dramatic action this role catalyzes Highlighting this incongruity, the film refigures Olivier's Gertrude as a repentant woman whose maternal instincts and wifely devotion are rekindled through encounters with her son and recollections of her deceased husband. Early in the narrative, Gertrude utters, in an interpolated passage, the fear that the cause of Hamlet's grief is not his love for Ophelia but her own remarriage This projection of Gertrude as a misguided mother and wife sets up the subsequent closet scene. Making important changes to Olivier's characterization, this scene underscores the alternative reading of Gertrude's character and also exposes the 'strangeness' in Olivier's

In Olivier's closet scene, the camera frames the mother–son interaction on Gertrude's bed to emphasize the scene's sexual connotations. Hamlet chastizes Gertrude for her lack of sexual restraint but also uncontrollably kisses her on the mouth In contrast, the Urdu film harnesses the Oedipal undertones of the mother–son relationship to a vivid portrayal of familial harmony by recoding the central prop, the bed, as that of a nurturing mother Even as he approaches the mother's bed-chamber, Sahu utters a singularly un-Hamlet-like prayer that he not violate the 'sacred bond God had forged between him and his mother' (*maa aur bete ka rishtha jo khuda ne joda hai, use na thodna*) This emphasis on family bonding presages the second half of the closet scene that commences with the ghost's entrance. Unlike Olivier's ominously invisible spectre, the Urdu film's ghost appears at an intimate proximity to Hamlet and emotionally pleads with the son to remember his filial bond with his mother Momentarily healing the social and political schisms in Denmark, the ghost's words and appearance symbolically reconfigure the sacred family bonds that ought to constitute the moral centre of any such society and state This re-constellation of family also leads to a telling transformation in Sahu/Hamlet's demeanour He turns from the violent killer of Polonius into 'mother's little boy', clinging to Gertrude with the grief-stricken cry of 'Mother! Father is gone!' (*ammi, abba chele gaye*). Before the conditioned eyes of Bombay film spectators, this is a *tableau* frame of the mother bonding with

her (eternally) childlike son on the maternal bed. The recognizable pattern of this static frontal framing serves to enclose spectators' 'awareness' of an element from the *Hamlet* narrative within the 'space of a social code' that has an ideal aspect.[64] The *tableau* reclaims Gertrude into her primary moral role in the action, and also re-orients spectatorial subjectivity from the casual chain of borrowed visual codes. The alteration obliquely illuminates the oddity of Gertrude's alliance with Claudius in the British film. Moreover, the filmmakers show critical awareness of the oddity by making one significant visual change in the prop; they remove the 'vaginal hood' from Olivier's portrayal of the bed.[65] Quite incongruous with this depiction of the nurturing mother's bed is the first half of Sahu's closet scene Its sequence of frames incorporates the narrative codes from Olivier's film and depicts Sahu/Hamlet asserting his own moral superiority over Gertrude's flawed character. But this sequence is peripheral to the scene's central emotional appeal, which in turn is tied, through a succession of affects, to the restorative forces of this family-centred moral drama.

As these accounts suggest, Sahu's *Hamlet* extrapolates an affect-governed drama of moral and social restoration from an imitation of the cause-and-effect logic of Olivier's revenge plot. How it underplays Olivier's revenge teleology, on the other hand, is demonstrated by the transposition of the Gonzago Play from the third to the fifth act. This shift excises much of Olivier's psychological explanation for Hamlet's actions, heightening instead the thrill in juxtaposing the revelation of Claudius's guilt with his punishment Thus, the emphasis in the Urdu film is on rationalizing the story and its larger message through a succession of depersonalized affects The role of Claudius is a good indicator of this trajectory of implicitly reflexive reorganization of Olivier's rational narrative. We find Sahu's Claudius in nearly every frame where Olivier's character had appeared, dutifully casting dark looks around him and zealously plotting with Polonius or Laertes. However, Claudius's presence is curiously ineffective in advancing the revenge plot, and he occupies an inconspicuous place in the web of stories featuring the women and Hamlet. Explicitly identified as a *jalim* or villain, Claudius functions more to spark emotions of thrill, fear or arrogance. Through this orchestration of affects, the fate of the evil Claudius who indulges in vicious *pravritti* for worldly goods and the flesh is pitted against the moral *telos* of a hero oriented towards the virtue of *nivritti*, or world-renunciation.

Balanced against Claudius, Sahu/Hamlet foregrounds affectively charged personifications of goodness, such as the women and a morally authoritative father-and-king grieving for the disruption of order and asking for its reinstatement in the family and the state Moreover, heightening the larger-than-human play of good and evil,

64 Vasudevan 'Shifting codes p 65 Vasudevan notes that the *tableau* arrangement differs from the iconic in that it presumes an underlying narrative structure In it the narrative flow comes to a temporary halt as characters attitudes and gestures compositionally arranged for a moment give, like an illustrative painting a visual summary of the emotional situation (p 61)

65 Donaldson *Shakespearean Films* p 31

Hamlet's propensity for *nivritti* is underscored through the careful recomposition of a scene at the heart of Olivier's psychological portrait of Hamlet. For the soliloquy 'To be or not to be', Olivier uses closeups to depict the existential battles raging within the humanist hero. Also, Hamlet's grandiose moral stature is emphasized by making him tower 'godlike' above the castle and its depraved inhabitants Sahu, in contrast, delivers the soliloquy (rather cryptically translated into such stock Hindi-film phrases as *zindagi aur mauth* [life and death]) from a semi-reclining position on the castle rooftop, as expressions of deep world-weariness battle with detachment on his face. In contrast to Olivier's closeups, only medium-shots are used. Emphatically avoiding a commanding stance, this scene draws attention to Hamlet's world-weary posture and its cosmic significance.

For the purposes of the Urdu film, then, an affect-governed interpretation, interweaving the contingent with the cosmic, is the most rational way to depict the *Hamlet* story through this visual medium It is also noteworthy that the Urdu production presents its emotion-cued logic through the precise technique Olivier uses to forge his logical links between the ambiguous parts of Shakespeare's story: a moving camera that connects spaces and characters in the castle. But Sahu's film alters the camera movements – and also punctuates them with stasis through iconic and *tableau* shots – in ways that reveal an order of emotions and not so much of cause-effect The adoption of Olivier's principal technique once again illustrates the hybrid practices of translation that guided these Urdu filmmakers' approach to the canonical Shakespeare film. This suggests that they were both imitating their prestigious source, and also trying to share and negotiate with Olivier the understanding of how to use western narrative and cinematic conventions in a way that made sense to them Such a cooperative attempt to reproduce the foreign film within a familiar aesthetic structure alerted the filmmakers to what in Olivier's conceptualization of cinematic techniques like the moving camera was incommensurable with their reasons for linking frames and narrative units.

Clearly, the process of translation as undertaken by these filmmakers reinforced certain exclusions. Most obviously, these Indian translations of modern European Shakespeare denied female subjects independent standpoints from which to critique such male-dominant epistemological negotiations with western cultural canons. In one sense, Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* might be read as yet another instance of anti-colonial rivalry where men are the protagonists and women the semiotic labourers Along with these hegemonic transactions, however, the popular Shakespeareans of Bombay were formulating a radically non-hierarchical translation practice that negotiated the understanding and use of narrative and cinematic codes with a 'non-aggregate community'[66] of cultural producers In

66 Naoki Sakai *Translation and Subjectivity on Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis MN University of Minnesota Press 1997) p 7

this hybrid space of translations, they were staging debates between rival ways of envisioning human existence through the technological art of cinema

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Crossing over: performing as a lady and a dame

CHRISTINE GERAGHTY

In an essay on the British film star Margaret Lockwood, Sarah Street points to a comment from *Picturegoer*, a popular British film magazine in the 1940s. Defending criticisms of British actresses, the commentator distinguishes between British 'ladies' and American 'dames', protesting that 'we may lack glamour and we may be old-fashioned but our actresses play the parts of ladies – not dames'.[1] I start with this quotation because much of what it expresses still rings true – the rivalry between the two cinemas, the use of class terms to describe the differences, the feeling that American cinema 'wins' in terms of glamour and that British performers therefore have to do something else to get approval. But 'Dame', of course, has other connotations in the British honours system, and ironically the British actresses who have done best recently in terms of Oscars and awards are Dames, such as Judi Dench and Maggie Smith, or those who will surely be Dames in due course, such as Emma Thompson. When *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) was nominated for various Oscars, the British contribution included two actresses. Emma Thompson, who was also responsible for the screenplay, and Kate Winslet. In this essay, I want to look at the way in which a study of female performance (by which I mean attention to how the body is shown as well as to the use of facial expression, gesture and voice) can take forward our work on contemporary stardom in film studies.

In an earlier essay which re-examined the concept of film stardom, I expressed some dissatisfaction with the theoretical model of film stardom which treats extra-filmic discourses such as advertising, the press and fan material as the crucial basis for the star image and

1 *Picturegoer* 10 May 1945 p 11. Cited in Sarah Street *A Place of One's Own?* Margaret Lockwood and British film stardom in the 1940s in Ulrike Sieglohr (ed.) *Heroines without Heroes Reconstructing Female and National Identities in European Cinema 1945–51* (London: Cassell 2000) pp 33–43

emphasizes polysemy, contradiction and instability as the key features of the star phenomenon[2] I suggested that in a celebrity-saturated world, it was important to identify how film stars differed from stars in sport, television or music, for instance, and argued that male method acting, in particular, seemed to be a way for film performers to claim a higher status, a phenomenon which needed to be understood through a study of performances in particular films. I thus share Alan Lovell's and Peter Kramer's contention that an emphasis on the star as text has directed interest away from performance and acting,[3] this essay represents an attempt to adopt a methodological approach which deliberately sets aside the intertextual elements which could readily be brought into play in relation to the stars I have chosen[4] Instead, in the main part of this essay, I want to focus tightly on what can be seen in the films – the material which is available to the viewer who is not a fan, who ignores the celebrity press and websites but admires good acting.

This seems a particularly appropriate approach to take to adaptations and heritage films in which acting is deemed a mark of quality. This essay looks at some specifics of performance and characterization in relation to female stars, using as examples the work of two British stars, Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet, and at the rather different emphases brought into play when the same terms are applied to the American Gwyneth Paltrow. In focusing on performance, I am not suggesting that it represents a pure element, uncluttered by intertextual consideration, nor that the textual space in which performance occurs is free from other imperatives. Indeed I have chosen Winslet and Paltrow, in particular, because I think of them as crossover stars – that is to say that their work reveals something about the possibilities of the adaptation/heritage film as national discourse which help to shape how acting is understood as a sign of status, class and skill. To adopt *Picturegoer*'s terms, Paltrow, despite being an American, is clearly a lady, and Winslet shows the potential at least to be an American rather than a British dame

Clearly, the contrast between lady and dame can only take us so far in assessing female performers. Nevertheless it has resonances which are productive in this context, bearing in mind that British cinema even in its most successful or innovative periods has often been seen as a difficult place for an actress[5] Some, like Joan Collins and Diana Dors, actively refused to be a lady: Collins turned her back on British cinema, claiming to 'shudder when I look back on all those dreary "Bad Girl" roles',[6] while Dors's creation of herself as a sex symbol in British films did not necessarily lead to popularity with British audiences.[7] Even when British glamour was acknowleged, it tended to be seen in terms of Hollywood. Thus, a *Picturegoer* reporter notes the 'usual complaint lodged against British studios – why do they always make our actresses look so dowdy?', but praised *The Constant Husband* (Sidney Gilliat, 1955) because

2 Christine Geraghty, 'Re-examining stardom questions of texts bodies and performance', in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds) *Reinventing Film Studies* (London Arnold, 2000), pp 183–201

3 Alan Lovell and Peter Kramer 'Introduction' in Lovell and Kramer (eds), *Screen Acting* (London Routledge 1999) pp 1–9

4 Examples could include Winslet's status (for a time) as a star who did not worry about weight the feminization of Thompson through motherhood and the ambivalence around Paltrow's lengthy list of celebrity dates

5 See for instance, John Hill *Sex Class and Realism British Cinema 1956–63* (London British Film Institute 1986) Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties Gender Genre and the New Look'* (London Routledge 2000) Sue Harper *Women and British Cinema Mad Bad and Dangerous to Know* (London Continuum 2000)

6 *Picturegoer* 12 November 1955

7 Sue Harper and Vincent Porter Cinema audience tastes in 1950s Britain *Journal of Popular British Cinema* vol 2 (1999) p 73

'I've never seen actresses look so lovely in colour outside an American film'.[8] Interestingly, apart from Kay Kendall who graduated to the USA just before her early death, none of the actresses so praised went on to have a major film career. Rather than competing with Hollywood glamour, appreciation of British stars often had to rest on other grounds. As Street suggests, 'home-grown stars were often invested with a patriotic imperative as bearers of British national culture',[9] and she singles out Anna Neagle, undoubtedly a lady, as a star who embodied the English Rose image and 'above all was nice in the same way that Laura Jesson was nice in *Brief Encounter*'.[10] The identification of Neagle with an English Rose repeated a common trope which has been used for English actresses as diverse as Virginia McKenna and Kate Winslet. Regional identity could also be important and strongly supported the star personae of, for instance, Betty Balfour and Gracie Fields, who could both be described more as comedienne than sex symbol.[11] A similar contrast can be seen in the 1960s while Rita Tushingham had a brief regional flourish with *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961) and *The Knack and How to Get It* (Richard Lester, 1965), the middle-class Julie Christie moved from being a youth icon to an English Rose in elaborate co-productions based on classic novels such as *Dr Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965) and *Far From the Madding Crowd* (John Schlesinger, 1967).

If notions of national or regional identity offered one way in which a British star could assert her difference from Hollywood, so too did the notion of good acting. Phyllis Calvert (another English Rose type and one of the ladies cited in the 1945 *Picturegoer* article) protested that after completing her seven-year film contract, 'it took me *ten* years in the London theatre to prove that I wasn't just the girl that all the troops want to marry, that I could act'.[12] Street offers a detailed account of the way in which Margaret Lockwood was pulled between glamour and acting. The documents she cites present Lockwood as acutely aware of the competition with Hollywood and keen to emphasize her ability as an actress. Lockwood asserts that she chose parts because of her preference for 'acting as opposed to starring', and Street traces the way in which this 'discourse on acting and performance is projected as a British trait'.[13] Twenty years later, Julie Christie is described as trying to 'fight off the whole apparatus' of being a star[14] and is quoted as saying 'I'm terribly serious about my work though I'm sure David Lean doesn't realize it. . He'd prefer me to act like a star But I can't.'[15] If good acting could give a star significance, the reverse could also apply and lack of popularity be ascribed to poor acting. Thus, *Films and Filming* in the mid 1950s blames 'falling female popularity at the box office' on inadequate performances compared to the male stars 'who are chosen, in Britain, at least, more often on acting ability than physical appearance'.[16]

8 Ronald Morris, *Picturegoer* 23 April 1955

9 Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London Routledge 1997) p 119

10 Ibid p 127

11 Geoffrey Macnab *Searching for Stars Rethinking British Cinema* (London Cassell 2000) p 55

12 Brian McFarlane *Sixty Voices* (London British Film Institute 1992) p 52

13 Sarah Street, *British Cinema in Documents* (London Routledge 2000) p 87

14 *Daily Mail* 15 April 1965

15 *Sunday Express* 18 July 1965

16 *Films and Filming* March 1955

If there is a pattern of the association between acting and British stardom, I am also suggesting a relationship between a certain kind of genre – the costume drama and, in particular, the classic adaptation – and the performance possibilities offered to the actress. This is a genre which, in the 1980/90s, has been characterized as heritage cinema and is strongly associated with British reworkings of the past.[17] Without entering the debates which have surrounded the genre, it is worth noting that adaptations of well-known classics (well-known through previous versions as well as the original novel) present actors in a particular way. Acting in cinema, particularly by stars, tends to be driven by the narrative and is associated with physical grace and psychological realism so that the best performance is regarded as invisible. What Naremore calls a 'representational rhetoric' encourages a 'restrained, intimate style'.[18] the Hollywood studio style in which the actor appears to be playing her/himself. This is reinforced by the fact that in cinema there is only one performance, that which is up on the screen. Unlike the theatre, there is no variation on different nights with different audiences, no possibilities for comparison between different actors in the same roles and no moment at the end when the actors come out of role and take a bow.

Writing on adaptations has been wary of the concept of fidelity to the original text as one which unhelpfully sets up a value system in which the film will almost inevitably fail. Nevertheless, the notion of faithfulness to the text nearly always remains a critical issue in adaptations of well-known novels,[19] and the pervasiveness of the theme indicates that the notion of something being performed in a different version is at the heart of such films. It is not uncommon for classic novels to be filmed more than once or for both television and film versions to be available, so that the sense of there being more than one account of the central story is part of the enjoyment of such films. In adaptations it is more clear than usual that actors are giving performances in particular roles; performances which could be compared in different versions of Austen's novels, for instance, and which involve an interpretation of a pre-defined character. A gap is thus opened up between character and performer and this is reinforced by the historical dimension since the costume and setting make it explicit that we are being invited to a performance in which characters, far from looking natural and at ease, are dressed up in elaborate and sometimes uncomfortable-looking costumes which often limit their physical movement. As Caughie has suggested, the settings may claim to be authentically of the past but the body of the actor remains stubbornly 'our contemporary',[20] setting up a relationship which makes conscious judgement of performance one of the central pleasures of viewing classic serial adaptations. In addition, this gap between past and present, although it can lead to a plunge into nostalgia for which the heritage genre has been criticized, also

17 See, for instance, John Hill's account of the heritage film in *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Andrew Higson, 'The heritage film and British cinema', in Higson (ed.) *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 232–48; Claire Monk, 'Heritage films and the British cinema audience in the 1990s', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, vol. 2 (1999), pp. 22–38. And since the films under discussion have a life beyond cinema on television and video, John Caughie's discussion of the classic serial is also pertinent: *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

18 James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 36–43.

19 It is perhaps worth noting that film adaptations are far more common than might be thought and that many classic Hollywood films are adaptations of novels which have now been forgotten. The point here refers to adaptations in which the original provides some kind of reference point against which different versions can be matched.

20 Caughie, *Television Drama*, p. 224.

allows for the use of irony as contemporary values are brought to bear on stories set in the past. In these different ways, the adaptation makes more obvious the process of getting the story on to the screen and of acting as part of that process.

Thompson's performance in *Sense and Sensibility* is a good example of this. Directed by Ang Lee from an adaptation by Thompson herself of Jane Austen's classic novel, the film offers a wide range of acting styles, from Hugh Grant's reprise of his lovable self to the comic overplaying of Imelda Staunton. Thompson's playing of the sensible Elinor is at the heart of the film and just as the narrative is organized through her, so her performance becomes the norm for good acting in the film; acting which is not showy or over-emotional but which we know must be there because of the nature of the text as an adaptation.[21] In addition, the film's irony also centres on Elinor since in *Sense and Sensibility*, as in other examples of the genre, it is the contrast between the manners and assumptions of the past and the 'contemporary, liberal, feminist sensibility'[22] of the heroine which provides the gap into which Elinor's ironic comments are inserted This in turn reinforces the emphasis on acting, since the script's ironic moments remind us of the modern woman (Thompson) who is here playing the perfect Austen heroine (Elinor) It is also an example of what is arguably a peculiarly English performance style, drawing on what the British actor Ian Richardson has described as 'English acting' [which] 'tends to be understated and depends heavily on nuance and irony'.[23]

In thinking about the performance, it is helpful to reflect on the presentation and use of body and voice separately In terms of physical appearance, Thompson is by no means glamorous Her hair has been lightened and she adopts the feminine hairstyles and pretty, flimsy dresses of the period, but the style does not suit her The empire-line dresses have the effect of making her look slightly stout, without the distractions of a full cleavage The necklines of her dresses, including her wedding dress, are often filled in with a shawl effect and at Barton Cottage she frequently wears an apron – towards the end of the film, for example, Elinor is at work in an apron while Marianne plays the piano in an elegant black dress This effect of 'plainness' is reinforced by Lee's direction. This is a historical film which places relatively little emphasis on sensuous materials, elaborate costume and fine decor, so Thompson's looks are unadorned by a more sensual mise-en-scene. In addition, the lighting serves to underline her rather drawn features and she is often lit rather harshly. Key conversations with Brandon and Edward, for instance, take place in daylight with bright light coming from the side, in the stilted conversation with Edward in Lucy Steele's presence, white light shines on Thompson's forehead and the side of her face In another example, a cut from Marianne in candlelight, making a silhouette of Willoughby, to Elinor in daylight in the

21 In a television programme about the making of the film (*Sense and Sensibility From Text to Screen* (Film Education/BBC 1997)) Imelda Staunton and Hugh Laurie laughingly comment that Thompson as scriptwriter was able to write herself the best part In an interview with Graham Fuller, Ang Lee comments very interestingly on the different kind of work he did with various cast members to get performances which matched their character and their experience Shtick and seduction *Sight and Sound* vol 6 no 3 (1996) p 24

22 Julianne Pidduck Of windows and country walks frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations *Screen* vol 39 no 4 (1998) p 383

23 Carole Zucker An interview with Ian Richardson making friends with the camera in Lovell and Kramer (eds), *Screen Acting* p 164

kitchen points to a contrast in treatment of the two actresses. Thompson's body is thus not presented as a glamorous object to be looked at but is instead used to express control Thompson uses few gestures and is often seen in long-shot, with her arms and body in a formal position. Rather than claiming space or expressing emotion through the body, it is Thompson's gaze which becomes an indicator of Elinor's control. Thus, Elinor observes both Brandon's first sight of Marianne and Marianne's immediate absorption with Willoughby after the rescue Her looks are often ironic or warning, particularly with her mother and sisters. The movement of the eyes and head involved in such looks means that Thompson's body is one of the ways in which the story is laid out intelligibly for the audience

Even more crucial in maintaining Thompson's position at the heart of the film are her voice and use of words. Naremore suggests that naturalist acting styles in cinema have 'made the language of players seem less elitist, closer to speech on the street' and that the voices of actors have become 'relatively transparent, less expressive instruments' [24] By contrast, the classic adaptation's literary origins and historical setting tend to bring language to the fore, and Thompson in *Sense and Sensibility* demonstrates how she controls a situation through language with the use of witty conceits and ironic summaries In a throwaway comment, Elinor can sum up Mrs Jennings or mock Marianne's view of Brandon as aged and infirm. She deflates Marianne's romantic notions ('What care I for colds when there is such a man?' 'You will care very much when your nose swells up') and uses long and complicated phrasing even at the height of emotion ('Believe me, Marianne, had I not been bound to silence I could have produced proof enough of a broken heart even for you'). Using language in this way, Thompson achieves an effect of certainty and control by appearing to underemphasize nuances and phrasing; her tone is rather flat and unexpressive, words are spoken quietly and quickly through a narrow mouth and the audience is expected to follow the irony of quite complicated constructions without the help of facial expression. Most characteristic though is the use of the word 'dearest'. Normally a term of endearment, when Thompson uses it the word becomes an ironic warning to characters on the verge of misbehaviour

In focusing on Thompson's work in *Sense and Sensibility*, I want to suggest that she is an example of how middle-class British actresses have succeeded as ladies, rather than dames, in contemporary cinema. In some sense, this heritage mode is the equivalent for female stars of the recognition that the 'method' acting route brings to male stars, but it relies on very different values [25] Thompson's work draws attention to the process of acting, but acting here is a matter of control, of making ideas and emotions intelligible It makes a virtue of restraint so that emotion has to be understood through the flatness of the performance and is thus clearly in that

24 Naremore *Acting in the Cinema* pp 47, 48

25 Naremore suggests that a film becomes a good showcase for professional acting if it provides moments when the characters are clearly shown to be wearing masks – in other words exhibiting high degrees of expressive incoherence (ibid p 76) when, for example actors portray the struggle to contain powerful feelings around loss addiction or illness I suggest that heritage films also show characters wearing masks and that they are thus good vehicles in which to showcase performance Hence, both kinds of performances are good bets for Oscar nominations

tradition of expressing strong feeling through niceness and understatement which Richard Dyer associates with Englishness [26] Nevertheless, such a performance can easily become mannered because it relies on a relatively narrow range of gestures which are designed to signify far more than is at first apparent It is a style marked by irony, which demonstrates the heroine's superior understanding, and in stories which ascribe moral values to manners and class positions, the emphasis in the acting style on restraint and hidden meaning makes for a particular fit between performance and genre which has proved highly successful.[27] While middle-class manners are normally a positive disadvantage for Hollywood stars, the adaptation provides them with a fitting home

I would suggest that this mode of acting has been adopted by a number of British actresses and in a modest way has made them unlikely stars. While there are individual differences, the work of Judi Dench, Maggie Smith and Helena Bonham Carter, for instance, could be studied from this angle. I want now, though, to turn to Kate Winslet – nominated for an Oscar for best supporting actress in *Sense and Sensibility* – to see what this model might tell us about her rather different work. While in Thompson's performance voice and body work together in a consistent approach, in Winslet's case the two registers of voice and body often work in contradiction So far as the voice is concerned, Winslet frequently adopts the manner of speaking I have described in Thompson's performance Early on in the film, Marianne imitates Elinor's subdued description of her feeling for Edward ('I greatly esteem him, I like him') and Winslet adopts these characteristically flat tones at other points. Like Elinor, Marianne has control of language and is one of the few characters who can respond to Elinor's irony, Winslet uses a flat tone for these sharp retorts, often expressed in a curt way – 'You are right' she self-mockingly replies to Elinor's comments about colds in the exchange quoted above The declamatory voice she uses for reciting poetry is relatively hushed and quick, and even at high points of emotion, such as when she reads Willoughby's letter of rejection, Winslet speaks quickly and softly, without the inflections which might have been expected to express strong feeling Thus, although in narrative terms, Marianne is the opposite of Elinor, Winslet is restrained in how she uses her voice, operating within the vocal range established by Thompson

The use of the body however is very different Her appearance is initially similar to Thompson's – light hair styled in the same way, the same pale, floating dresses. Yet Winslet gives the impression of needing to escape from the restrictions of the historical costumes and manners [28] The empire line emphasizes her full bosom and her strong body is clear under the thin material of the dresses. Her hair is frequently disheveled, escaping from the ribbons or hats that attempt to restrain it Her white skin colours easily and Marianne is seen

26 Richard Dyer 'Feeling English' *Sight and Sound* vol 4 no 3 (1994) pp 16–19

27 That this valuing of restraint is connected with genre as well as gender can be seen by comparing the moral sympathy demanded by the undemonstrative Brandon and Knightley in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* respectively, compared with the more expansive Churchill and Willoughby (the different acting styles would also repay examination)

28 Ang Lee in the *Sight and Sound* interview with Fuller comments on the difficulty of controlling Winslet and on physical things like a tendency to frown to smile too broadly which he tried to stop her doing

biting her lip and pinching her own cheeks to deliberately bring up the colour. More often, though, the blushing is the 'natural' product of physical exertions or the pressures of emotion Thus, her flushed face is caught in closeup on a number of occasions: under a straw hat when cutting reeds with Brandon, with Willoughby at the picnic or with Brandon in the garden at the end of the film. The lighting, often candlelight, reinforces Winslet's velvety skin tones and softens her face. The difference between her and Thompson is reinforced by the framing which, as Pidduck notes, characterizes the film [29] While Elinor looks, Marianne is looked at, and Winslet's beauty becomes the focus for characters and audience

29 Pidduck Of windows and country walks pp 381–400

Winslet's strong physical presence in the film is used to create her character and to forward the narrative. It is Marianne who is first to enter the Dashwoods' new home, breaking into the idyllic picture of the cottage exterior to explore what is inside. Her relationship with Willoughby is expressed through physical gestures, for instance when he swings her round at a picnic or drives her recklessly in his carriage; on such occasions, words fail her and she screams in delight But the story also emphasizes the dangers of relying too much on the body The only embraces of the film are given to Marianne, but they occur when she is picked up and carried, first by Willoughby and then by Brandon, after the limits of her strength have been tested and found wanting. In thus exposing the limitations on Winslet's physical presence, the film accords with the values of restraint which are strong both in the genre and in Lee's direction, but this does not disguise the different emphasis on the body which marks Winslet's acting style While Thompson's body is used with restraint to reinforce her verbal control, Winslet's, in opposition to the use of her voice, is used not only to give the conventional pleasures of looking at the female body but also the pleasures of a sensual challenge to the British female acting style. While clearly being a lady, Winslet also offers the glamorous pleasures of the dame

We can see how this develops in two later costume films in which Winslet starred: *Jude* (Michael Winterbottom, 1996) and *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1998) It is no accident that Winslet has appeared in these historical/literary dramas, since they offer the opportunity to repeat the contradictory acting style and narrative positioning she deploys in *Sense and Sensibility* Thomas Hardy's relentlessly depressing tale gives Winslet and director Winterbottom little room for manoeuvre, but we can nevertheless see that some of the elements are drawn on here. The narrative positions Sue as the rebellious women who is destroyed by the narrow conventions of society and accepts her punishment. In many ways this is done conventionally through a mise-en-scene in which Winslet's blonde hair, light blouses and bright dresses consistently stand out from the dark background. Her association in Jude's mind with the carved

angel stands as a metaphor for the possibilities of the loving relationship they could have had. The defining moment for Winslet's performance, though, occurs early in the film A previous scene has indicated a political source for Sue's rebellion when she attends a socialist meeting, but now she sits still and silent, filmed in long-shot. Afterwards she joins Jude and his friends in the pub and is caught by the camera in movement, drinking and smoking. This lively, vital moment gives Winslet the opportunity to express the character's rebellion physically, through her body, and it is through her naked body that Sue offers herself to Jude when the two set up house together, despite their unmarried state These two motifs reappear in *Titanic*.

In terms of budget and production, *Titanic* is in a different league from the other films discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, it does have some of the characteristics of an adaptation from a classic story. It has a double story, stressed this time by the use of the voiceover which clearly identifies, and attempts to bridge, the gap between past and present as the elderly Rose tells the story of her youth. In addition, *Titanic* is of course telling a story which has its basis in historical fact and in other filmed versions, so it shares with the classic adaptation that sense of a different version of the same story.[30] Like the heritage texts discussed by Pidduck, it is informed by a feminist sensibility, mainly through its strong identification with Rose's viewpoint, which is explicitly articulated in the script when Rose makes a bitter joke about the men behaving as if they were 'Masters of the Universe' or when her mother points to the limitations placed on women's choices. In addition, the film's strong moral message is rooted in a debate about the value of class and manners. In a strong binary drive, the British who run the ship are associated with the East Coast aristocracy while Jack Dawson represents the freedom of America and the West It is into this binary that Winslet, in her first blockbuster, steps.

I do not propose to trace the romantic narrative path whereby Rose ends up, under the Statue of Liberty, adopting the name of Dawson and clearly stepping westwards into the adventurous life recorded in the photographs by the older Rose's bed Instead I want to look at moments in Winslet's performance to illustrate why as an actress she was so suited to the part Once again, body and voice are key features, but this time they are differently articulated When she first appears, Winslet is hidden under a wide-brimmed hat. A camera movement allows us to see that her face is heavily made up, her red hair neatly tucked away and her black and white coat firmly buttoned up to the neck. It takes the voiceover to tell the audience that 'inside I was screaming'. This image is soon contrasted with another, that of Winslet running along the deck, hair wild, arms and bosom on show in a skimpy, delicate dress While Winslet never returns to the buttoned-up state of her first appearance, throughout the first part of

30 In her discussion of Hitchcock's *Sabotage* (1936) Suzanne Speidel draws attention to Hollywood's liking for a story which has already proved itself in another medium Times of death in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Sabotage* in Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (eds) *The Classic Novel From Page to Screen* (Manchester Manchester University Press 2000) p 133

the film she oscillates between the controlled and organized body demanded by the East Coast (at one point her mother laces her into her corset) and the freer, looser movements allowed with Jack. This is linked to questions of manners and different forms of socially acceptable behaviour: at the dinner table in the first-class section Winslet is relatively immobile, using eyes and face to warn Jack of potential solecisms and leaving the more expansive gestures (leaning sideways for more champagne, throwing a lighter) to Jack, who is taking control; at the party downstairs, however, her beautiful outfit is transformed, her bare back turned more often to camera, her shoes shaken off and skirt lifted. In this scene, Winslet's body is continuously moving as she drinks, smokes, laughs, spins and dances, finally transforming the feminine skills of ballet into a competition of bodily strength. Such a demonstration prepares us for the second half of the film when the romantic commitment has been made but the couple must battle to stay together. It is striking that it is Winslet's body, rather than that of teen idol Di Caprio, which is on display, competing with the spectacle of the ship sinking; draped in wet fabric, her strong shoulders and arms are revealed as she works her way, axe in hand, along the flooded corridors.

In some senses, Winslet's voice works in *Titanic* as it does in *Sense and Sensibility*, against the sensuality which her body displays. Her accent is now American but her voice is still high and light, she speaks formally and is prone to anglicisms: 'goodness gracious' she exclaims when her fiance Cal presents her with the fabulous diamond, and Jack's drawings are deemed 'rather good, very good actually'. Nevertheless, *Titanic*'s screenplay has few of the long speeches of the classic adaptation (with the best given to Di Caprio) and Winslet's speaking voice becomes less important than the nervous laughter, breaths and sighs which accompany her bodily movements. At the party below-deck her first sound is a nervous laugh as she looks round the crowd; when Jack pulls her to him to dance, she responds with an apparently instinctive exhalation of breath and her dancing is accompanied by little shrieks and laughs. When Cal hits her as a warning against her running around with Jack, she tries to pull herself together but sinks to the floor, moans and holds her stomach. Similarly, when she and Jack run round the ship to escape Cal's manservant, the Irish music on the soundtrack is accompanied by Winslet's exclamations and giggles. By contrast, it is significant that the voiceover which gives coherence to the narrative and measures the significance of each event is performed by a different actress.

Given all this it is hardly surprising that *Titanic* uses Winslet's body for some of its set-piece moments, loading it with narrative significance. Thus, the high-spot of the romance is the moment of unity when Winslet's body, supported by Di Caprio, becomes the live figurehead of the modernist ship, caught up in the sensation of

flying and moving towards the West and the sunset. And the nude scene, which seems initially to be a further demonstration of Rose's love and Winslet's authenticity, has a narrative purpose in that the sketch becomes Rose's act of defiance to her fiance, a symbol of her refusal to have her living body locked up like the picture. And finally, as they wait to be rescued, Rose complains 'I can't feel my body' and it takes a conscious act of will, inspired by her promise to Jack, to reanimate her freezing body to seek a return to life. But in some senses these set pieces are less important for the film as a whole than the living, breathing bodily presence with which Winslet suffuses the stilted script and computer-assisted special effects.

In *Titanic*, Winslet makes the move that was promised in earlier films and establishes a crossover position between the British heritage picture and the Hollywood star vehicle. She remains a lady, still able to use the class tones and the conscious performing style of the British adaptation, but her physical appearance and the use of her body for sensual appeal puts her into the more glamorous tradition associated with Hollywood. This is particularly important for *Titanic*, given its message of the triumph of the American spirit of freedom over the classbound and frigid British Although in the narrative Rose is East Coast American, Winslet is a British actress. To have a representative of the uptight heroines of British heritage drama, the frumpy wearers of shawls and bonnets, won over to American filmmaking is a triumph indeed.

I want to turn now from Winslet moving West to an American star moving East, Gwyneth Paltrow. Paltrow has a more extensive film career than either Thompson or Winslet, and here I want to concentrate on two of what might be called her British films (in setting if not production terms) and to look at how costume films have allowed her performance style to develop in a particular way Paltrow's first leading role was in *Emma* (Douglas McGrath, 1996), an Austen adaptation released shortly after *Sense and Sensibility*. The film's credits emphasize the distance between audience and drama in the historical film, taking us literally to a different world which is presented first through a spinning globe on which the settings of Britain, London and Highbury are identified and then, in a series of painted miniatures, the buildings and people of the forthcoming drama This sense of a different, more orderly world is continued in the film which is organized around a series of dinners and parties The mise-en-scene presents the internal and external decor as highly composed, decorative and elegant. A voiceover positions Emma within the society she seeks to organize and at various points Emma's voice, motivated by diaries and letters, provides a commentary on events. The picturesqueness of the historical setting and use of the voiceover opens up the possibilities for irony, while the casting of an American actress as the English heroine of a revered classic foregrounds even more the question of performance

In playing Emma, Paltrow conforms to, but softens, the model exemplified by Thompson, using her voice and body in a similar way In her first period piece, *Jefferson in Paris* (James Ivory, 1995), Paltrow's role had been one of almost silent witness, but in this highly wordy adaptation, Emma seeks to control scenes and people through her use of language. Thus, she manoeuvres through delicate irony ('If you prefer . . if you think . . .') Harriet's rejection of Robert Martin, and rebukes Knightley by lightly mocking his declarations of moral certainty ('How fascinating . .') Emma's speeches are marked, even at times of emotion, by elaborate grammar and complicated phrasing which Paltrow delivers in a light, often hushed tone, 'my astonishment is beyond anything I can express' she whispers rapidly to Mr Elton in response to his unwelcome marriage proposal Although Paltrow, more consistently than Thompson, stresses particular words in a sentence, the speed with which she speaks is comparable and at times, particularly in voiceovers, her voice flattens and deepens to adopt Thompson's more consistently ironic tone. Thus, when she believes Frank Churchill to be in love with her, she tells herself 'I felt listless after and had some sort of headache', and continues in a lowered, harder tone 'so I must be in love as well'. Later, as she picks off the daisy petals while determinedly not thinking of Mr Knightley (whom she now knows she really loves), she comments in sardonic tones: 'We should not have daisies in the garden They really are drab little flowers ' Like Thompson, Paltrow often speaks through a narrow, closed mouth and her conversations with Harriet and Mrs Weston provide a contrast between her still face and their relatively more open expressions, particularly around the mouth, of humour or astonishment

Paltrow thus adopts the accent of the English middle classes and does so with the ironic and mannered restraint which is the favoured mode of speech in the classic adaptation. In body and movement she also fits this style. Her hair is fair and pulled back into the fashion of period leaving her face exposed, though the back of her head is often decorated with curls, ribbons or flowers, softening the effect. The empire-line dresses, mainly in white and soft pastels, fall from the bust without revealing her figure, she frequently wears shawls over her shoulders and, though the necklines are low, her cleavage is minimal Indeed one of the points of contrast between Emma and Harriet is size, which in the 1990s perhaps stands as a better indication of vulgarity than low birth. The film frequently uses long-shots in which two or more characters are framed in conversation, and the use of a relatively restrained camera allows for an emphasis on graceful movement Emma's more pointed remarks are often disguised by a graceful gesture or smiling nod and, as with Thompson, the body here becomes a vehicle for decorum and sometimes elegant dissimulation rather than the expression of feeling

Paltrow in *Emma* therefore takes on the performance style of a British actress, but there are differences from Thompson and Winslet which proclaim her crossover status and the possibilities she also has as an American star. Paltrow performs being a British actress with the appropriate emphasis on manners, restraint and control, but this is leavened by another kind of look which is connected to the type of glamour which Thompson specifically lacks Winslet gains glamour by giving the impression she cannot be restrained by the genre, but *Emma* allows, indeed demands, that Paltrow remains controlled while being glamorous. This is particularly clear in the closeups at key points which position Paltrow as the star of the romance narrative the opening closeup of her smiling broadly at her friend's wedding, a wide smile, reinforced by red lipstick; a number of striking closeups in an archery contest with Knightley when her glossy hair and perfect skin are emphasized; and the closeups as she accepts Knightley's proposal, when he remains in shade but her face is highlighted by sun The glamour of this rather different register of lighting and expression is reinforced by the use of her body which, though not on display for sexual invitation, is revealed to be that of a contemporary model The bones in the shoulders, the slight frame and the thin arms give her body a significance outside the conventions of acting and genre – the desirable appearance of a modern young woman.

It is this emphasis on the modern young woman which I want to examine through another of Paltrow's British films, *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt, 1997), for what John O Thompson called 'the commutation test' [31] *Sliding Doors* has some connections to the adaptations I have looked at so far The rendering of modern London seems to owe much to the heritage approach of films like *Emma* in its use of landscape, its focus on dress and style as bearers of meaning and its episodic narrative underpinned by the dynamics of romance. The narrative takes an initial event – Helen leaving work after she has been sacked – and shows us what might happen in two stories which develop in parallel, in one of which she catches the train home, in the other she misses it As in an adaptation, performance is thus foregrounded in that Paltrow plays out two different versions of the same character and the gap between the two stories allows for the possibility of irony I want to suggest that in *Sliding Doors* Paltrow deploys the acting style of *Emma*, but that there are consequences for doing this outside the heritage mise-en-scene In the modern setting, her status as a Hollywood star is more firmly in play and the value placed on acting is diminished, as is our sense of the actress being in control of her performance.

Initially the film works hard to emphasize Paltrow's performance of ordinary Englishness Although smartly dressed, her long brown hair reduces her glamour and she wears minimal makeup Her voice is deepened but has the middle-class accent and ironic tones she drew on in *Emma* Thus, when she is sacked by a group of young

31 John O Thompson 'Screen acting and the commutation test' *Screen* vol 19 no 2 (1978) pp 55–69

City men, she speaks quickly and quietly, congratulating them on finally getting rid of her: 'this is perfect . . . congratulations . . . very well done'. Shortly afterwards, in one version of the story she finds her boyfriend, Gerry, in bed with the American Lydia and announces that she has had 'a dreadful day' and offers 'a cup of tea' before laying into him. Thus, the film establishes early on Paltrow's acting abilities in adopting an English accent and its ironic tones, and does so with a knowingness indicated by a headline in the newspaper Helen reads at one point: 'A Very English Oscar Triumph'.

But the film's double narrative provides us with two versions of this English Paltrow and the transformation is really the main point of the film – the point which it returns to again and again as if it cannot quite believe that a Hollywood actress (a US dame) is appearing in a British film The brown-haired Helen, whom Lydia describes as 'quite pretty in a British, horsy sort of way', is thereafter the heroine of the version in which Helen does not find out about Gerry's betrayal. Kept in a state of innocent unknowing, she finds herself a menial job to support him, and dresses down in unflattering cardigans and childish plaits. But the Helen who discovers the betrayal is literally transformed, washing the man out of her hair by getting a new haircut which turns her from a sexless, rather drab girl into a chic blonde in a smart polo neck, an image which, of course, the audience is expected to recognize as Paltrow, the star. From this point, blonde Helen becomes more glamorous, displaying a series of cropped tops, well-cut trousers, shoestring-strap dresses and black leather coats.

Paltrow's performance as the blonde Helen uses some of the traits of her Emma. In particular, in *Emma*, she had adopted two ways of looking the first a large-eyed, rather mournful but direct look to camera or character which seems to express frankness and openness and in *Emma* is used particularly when the character is apologizing for her attempts to organize other people's affairs; the second a much more indirect look in which the chin is tucked in and Paltrow looks up from under her brow The latter is particularly useful because it offers the appearance of restraint and modesty but is often flirtatious or calculating [32] These looks reappear in *Sliding Doors* and are used particularly in the depiction of the relationship with James. Thus, at an early meeting with James over a milkshake, Paltrow alternates direct looks at him with glances down or away, while later on at a meal with his friends, a series of glances concludes with a direct exchange of looks, though Paltrow continues to cover her mouth with her hand. Significantly, the more modest look, the glance up with the chin tucked in, is used when the blonde Helen offers to organize the restaurant opening for one of James's friends. The modern career girl is softened by this look into a character who is made more appealing through being more tentative. Certainly, Paltrow here lacks the controlling gaze which Thompson deployed in

32 Despite my self denying ordinance of sticking to the films I cannot resist commenting on the likeness to Princess Diana s famous shy but flirtatious look Paltrow uses this look again at the end of *A Perfect Murder* (Andrew Davis 1998) to indicate innocence guilt and getting away with it This film is an example of Paltrow taking her English (East Coast) mode back into an American genre

Sense and Sensibility. The looks which in *Emma* were used to indicate the heroine's engagement with the world she seeks to control are in the more modern setting transformed into a 'little girl' defence against the world's difficulties.

This effect is reinforced by the lack of emphasis given to dialogue in *Sliding Doors* Whereas the classic adaptation gives actresses speeches and wordplay to demonstrate their skills, the film in a modern setting works to silence the heroine. From her relatively loquacious beginning when she is sacked, Helen grows more silent; in the key scenes of transformation (the decoration of the office, the rowing sequence, the restaurant opening) we are invited to look rather than listen In these montage sequences, the emphasis is not so much on advancing the narrative as on looking at Paltrow. Thus, the decorating montage involves three changes of clothes, with Paltrow, in effect, posing mutely as if she were advertising fashionable 'lifestyle' womenswear In addition, Helen's dialogue is often incoherent and inarticulate. There is a certain emphasis on her swearing, using British terms like 'wanker', which is surely meant to create a slight frisson in the gap between the coarse language and the classic image created by Emma and other roles In the romantic scenes with James, humour is generated by Helen being unable to express her feelings. This is part of a wider joke about British modes of expression, exemplified by James's use of jokes and the Monty Python phrases which Helen adopts, but its effect is again to undermine Helen's control of her situation.

It is a long way from the elegances of *Sense and Sensibility* to the low-budget *Sliding Doors*, and Paltrow's status as a crossover star, with Hollywood glamour and British class, was confirmed much more securely with *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998) which significantly returned her to a historical setting But the interest of *Sliding Doors* is that in it we can see features of the British female acting style disassociated from the literary script and the restrained setting of the adaptation Analyzing *Sliding Doors* in this way demonstrates how important the generic features of the classic adaptation are in providing the space which is organized around both a particular character (the ironic feminist-before-her-time heroine) and a distinctive acting style

In this discussion of the particular performances of three actresses, I have drawn attention to three main points which are interlinked Firstly, national contexts are important in considering acting styles, and Winslet and Paltrow, by crossing the line between 'lady' and 'dame' in different directions, illustrate that a star performance involves an inflection of national positions. So-called 'post-heritage' films, such as *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998) and *Shakespeare in Love*, push this further with international star casts, drawing on a 'melange of accents, star personas and acting styles'[33] which may have a different relationship to the modes of performance I have

33 Julianne Pidduck *'Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love* screening the Elizabethans in Ginette Vincendeau (ed) *Film/Literature/Heritage* (London British Film Institute 2001) p 133

described here. Secondly, thinking about performance means paying attention to the different ways in which a particular acting style fits a particular genre. Thirdly, and closely linked to this, it can be noted that acting styles and the values placed on them are heavily gendered. Certain kinds of genre/performance combinations direct attention to acting and give it value, a form of method acting is commonly adopted by male stars to this effect and the heritage film can serve a similar purpose for female ones. Just as gangster films such as *GoodFellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990), *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1991) and *Heat* (Michael Mann, 1995) have allowed male actors to enjoy 'putting on a show',[34] so classic adaptations have given actresses the opportunity to draw attention to their acting skills Such a showcase has been particularly useful to British actresses because of the tradition of marking and valuing acting as something which British stars do differently from Hollywood. Focusing on performance thus helps to explain the rather unusual success of British female stars in recent Hollywood films and maybe also the use of the adaptation as a rite of passage, a testing of the craft, for certain American dames such as Paltrow and, more recently, Gillian Anderson in *The House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000) and Uma Thurman in *The Golden Bowl* (James Ivory, 2000). The bravura performances made possible, indeed demanded, by the setting and language of such adaptations, indicate that a consideration of text and performance is important in understanding the changing modes of cinema stardom.

34 Naremore *Acting in the Cinema* p 43

Recognizing *Billy Budd* in *Beau Travail*: epistemology and hermeneutics of an auteurist 'free' adaptation

CATHERINE GRANT

these were circumstances which in the dearth of exact knowledge as to . true antecedents opened to the invidious a vague field for surmise [1]

How do we know when a film is an adaptation of a literary (or other) text? We know, of course, when it, and the discourses which surround it, signal this. As John Ellis writes of literature/film relations 'The adaptation trades upon the memory of the novel, a memory that can derive from actual reading, or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated cultural memory'.[2] In this kind of trade, the most important act that films and their surrounding discourses need to perform in order to communicate unequivocally their status as adaptations is to (make their audiences) *recall* the adapted work, or the cultural memory of it. There is no such thing in discourse as a 'secret' adaptation There is 'plagiarism' a valueless and proscribed version of surreptitious copying, at least when 'found out'. By contrast, film adaptations acquire their meaning, as well as at least part of their intrinsic cultural and economic value, through an openly acknowledged and socially sanctioned form of imitation of, or borrowing from, an earlier text Adaptation is precisely, as Suzanne Speidel writes, 'a process which *draws attention to* its own reproductive act'.[3] The film audience is

1 Herman Melville Billy Budd sailor (an inside narrative) in *Billy Budd Sailor and Selected Tales* (Oxford Oxford University Press 1998) p 300 Phrase cited by Charles Taylor s review *Beau Travail* URL www salon com/ent/movies/review/2000/03/31/beau_travail htm (31 March 2000)

2 John Ellis The literary adaptation – an introduction *Screen* vol 23 no 1 (1982) p 4 cited in Erica Sheen Introduction in Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (eds) *The Classic Novel From Page to Screen* (Manchester Manchester University Press 2000) p 14

3 Suzanne Speidel Times of death in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Alfred Hitchcock s *Sabotage* in Giddings and Sheen (eds) *The Classic Novel*, p 145 Emphasis mine

invited, in a variety of cinematic and extra-cinematic ways, to recognize the 'original' in the 'copy'.

It is the case, however, that not all avowed adaptations attempt to invite unambiguous acts of recognition. Robin Wood, writing of the 'hesitation' between the 'faithful' and the 'free' adaptation, notes that one might consider Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations* (1998), 'where the adaptation is so free that, after a while, one ceases to think of Dickens at all'.[4] Wood adds that Jane Campion's film *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996) 'continuously presents itself as a representation of the novel, yet could not possibly satisfy anyone who loves and admires it'.[5] Despite the different 'liberties' these films take as adaptations, they both adopt the title of the literary work as the first, and most obvious, marker of an intertextual relationship with their 'source' In his very suggestive discussion of adaptation, Robert Stam writes that by carrying over the same title, adaptations might 'take advantage of a pre-existing market'.[6] He argues that adaptations that use a new title (two of his examples are *Clueless* [Amy Heckerling, 1995]/*Emma*, and *Man Friday* [Jack Gold, 1975]/*The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*) are sometimes attempting partially to 'disguise' their sources but, more often, are signalling a transfiguration of particular aspects (say, of narrational or ideological perspective, or of location in space and time) 'Transfiguration' is one of the main subgeneric features of the free adaptation, the one that most clearly distinguishes it from its parent genre Conventional adaptations are required on the whole to abide by the 'deontology of translating' their source, as Alain Cohen puts it,[7] their main aim is 'to reduce difference, to find the correlative of one medium (literature) in another (film) '[8] Free adaptations, on the other hand, capitalize on difference. They are expected to *manifest* innovation and ingenuity with regard to interpreting (and not translating) the narrative systems of their 'sources'.

The often-dramatic 'swerves'[9] of free adaptations – their 'perversions' (turnings away from an original) – are part of what can make them a fairly valuable commodity in the 'commerce of auteurism' [10] As well as a term pointing to the contemporary vestiges of the art cinema of 'personal expression' born in the New Waves of the 1950s and 1960s, auteurism, as Timothy Corrigan has conceptualized it, is a commercial strategy for organizing non-mainstream audience reception, 'one which is bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur' [11] With the vehicle of the free adaptation, contemporary film auteurs can attempt to make aspects of literary classics and other texts their own, over-writing them with their own traceable signatures, perhaps reconfiguring them by incorporating references to other (rewritten) intertexts. As well as being sold on their merits as self-contained artefacts, these films can be sold to audiences of the directors' own fans and also to those who might be curious to see what has become of the 'original' after it has been reworked

4 Robin Wood *The Wings of the Dove* (London British Film Institute 1999) p 14

5 Ibid p 14

6 Robert Stam Beyond fidelity the dialogics of adaptation in James Naremore (ed) *Film Adaptation* (London The Athlone Press 2000) p 65

7 Alain J-J Cohen, Three *Madame Bovarys* Renoir Minnelli, Chabrol', in Jonathan Bignell (ed) *Writing and Cinema* (Harlow Longman, 1999) p 131

8 Lesley Stern *Emma* in Los Angeles remaking the book and the city in Naremore (ed), *Film Adaptation*, p 226

9 I employ the notion of swerving in a similar way to that used by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence a Theory of Poetry* (Oxford Oxford University Press 1997) That is to say, an action carried out in conscious or subconscious attempts to avoid being 'enslaved by any precursor s system' (p 29)

10 The commerce of auteurism is a chapter title in Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1991) pp 101–36 see also Catherine Grant www auteur com *Screen*, vol 41 no 1 (2000) pp 101–8 for my 'update of Corrigan's work

11 Corrigan *A Cinema Without Walls* p 103

What interests me in this article, however, is not so much the swerves that free adaptations make, but the ways in which they *draw attention to* their status as adaptations, at the same time as they exhibit ambivalence towards the whole enterprise of adapting. In his chapter on adaptations, Stam bases his discussion on concepts drawn from Gérard Genette's work on 'transtextuality', a term used by the French theorist to refer to 'all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts' [12] I shall examine what is at stake in the transtextuality of an extremely free or loose film adaptation from which many of the conventional cues for recognition of its literary 'source' were absent, or in which they were veiled: *Beau Travail* (literal translation, 'good work', France, 1999), directed and co-scripted by the contemporary French auteur Claire Denis. Despite its different title, location, timeframe, character names, substantially altered 'story' and narrational and ideological perspective, as well as the prominence of its other important intertexts and its formal ambiguity, everybody seemed to 'know', judging by the discourses that surrounded the film, that *Beau Travail* was a loose adaptation of Herman Melville's 1891 novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* Certainly, most reviews of *Beau Travail* and much of its promotional material openly and, most of the time, unequivocally avowed a relationship with Melville's novella. This being the case, my article will go on to investigate the role played in the reception of *Beau Travail* as an auteurist free literary adaptation by a wider range of cognitive bases beyond the film than are usually accounted for in adaptation studies. The most obvious of these (the original literary source) is conventionally considered. But rarely has there been a broader focus on what Steve Neale (following Lukow and Ricci), has referred to as cinema's 'inter-textual relay':[13] that is, on those discourses of publicity, promotion and reception which make known the generic framework within which to comprehend films, and which evoke for their audiences the appropriate 'horizon of expectations and "rules of the game"' [14] I shall argue that the (even more contingent than usual) claims and counter-claims which surround *Beau Travail* regarding its status as an adaptation have something useful to tell us about contemporary film–literary transtextuality, at least in the auteurist field of production, distribution and reception.

Recalling *Billy Budd*

> *A film cues the spectator to execute a definable variety of operations* [15]

Neither the opening or final credits of *Beau Travail* indicate that the film ought to be received as an adaptation of *Billy Budd, Sailor*, the

12 Stam 'Beyond fidelity' p 65 Stam appears to be translating a sentence from Genette's *Palimpsestes* (1982) but he does not indicate the full reference Film titles can be used obviously as a manifest marker of intertextuality, following Genette's notion of architextuality a category of 'transtextuality' which refers to the generic taxonomies suggested or refused by the titles or infratitles of a text (p 65)

13 Steve Neale *Genre and Hollywood* (London Routledge 2000), p 39, following Gregory Lukow and Steven Ricci The "audience" goes "public" inter-textuality genre and the responsibilities of film literacy' *On Film* vol 12 no 3 1984) pp 28–36

14 Hans Robert Jauss *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* trans T Bahti (Brighton Harvester Press 1982) p 88 While it may seem perverse to regard the free adaptation as having rules there is much *prima facie* evidence of its institutional and social existence as an operative film subgenre It is a widespread label used by the film industry (one often appearing in the packaging and marketing of films as we shall see with *Beau Travail*) And it is a very prominent critical and theoretical term in the evaluative and analytic discourse of filmgoers reviewers and academics My understanding of genre is close to that argued for by Steve Neale in his chapter Dimensions of genre in *Genre and Hollywood* See especially pp 39–43

15 David Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London Routledge 1985) p 29

scenario credit listing only the screenwriters Jean-Pôl Fargeau and Claire Denis. From the outset, *Beau Travail* chooses not to make even the slightest attempt to 'continuously present itself as a representation' of Melville's text, in the way that more conventional adaptations of it have, such as Robert Chapman and Louis Coxe's play *Billy Budd*, Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd*, and Peter Ustinov's film *Billy Budd*.[16] Unlike these more 'faithful' hypertexts[17] of the novella, *Beau Travail* provides an audiovisual experience in which the process of source recognition is neither rapid nor phenomenologically automatic.[18] How then, if at all, might spectators perceive or mentally construct any connection to *Billy Budd, Sailor*, to the generally circulated cultural memory of Melville's novella, or to any of its hypertexts?

By beginning with these predominantly formal questions concerning the film's transtextuality, my discussion might appear to be about to proceed along the well-trodden path of comparative adaptation criticism, listing similarities with and differences from the earlier versions of a film's story My intention, though, is different. I wish to investigate the formal conditions under which the film as a stand-alone artefact might be actively comprehended as a free adaptation As I shall show later, this is a theoretical concern: films do not 'stand alone', least of all from their intertextual relay. In any case, the contingency of the relation between textual structures and spectatorial response must be acknowledged. But, for now *hypothetically*, how might the film *as a film* 'hail' those spectators who are already familiar with the *Billy Budd, Sailor* hypotext (specifically, with the novella and with any of the cumulative, faithful versions of its story)? And how might it encourage these theoretical knowing spectators to act on the basis of their recognition, to 'motivate [their interpretation of the film] transtextually?'[19]

The first image of *Beau Travail*, just preceding the display of its first credit, is a black screen, but the first sounds are provided by a few seconds of music from the beginning of the Prologue to Britten's opera *Billy Budd*, the recording set at a low volume and mixed with the sound of a buffeting wind. In the full version of the opera's Prologue, Captain Edward Vere, an elderly British Navy captain long since retired, recalls his role in the fateful events on his battleship in the summer of 1797, and ponders the nature of good and evil, he returns to complete his pondering and to express remorse in the opera's Epilogue. But there is no singing in the brief segment used in the film, and the sound mixing makes it difficult to make out the music clearly. The film does not seem to draw particular attention, then, to its opening quotation. Nor does it clearly signal that the opera might serve as a narrative or cognitive base beyond the film that might aid in its comprehension.

Interestingly, though, *Beau Travail* does go on to recall, in its own

16 Robert H Chapman and Louis O Coxe *Billy Budd* (New York Hill & Wang 1962) first performed off-Broadway in 1949, *Billy Budd* Opera in Four Acts music by Benjamin Britten libretto by E M Forster and Eric Crozier (London Boosey & Hawkes 1951), first performed at the Royal Opera House London in 1951 *Billy Budd* (UK 1962) a film written and directed by Peter Ustinov and co scripted by DeWitt Bodeen starring Terence Stamp Robert Ryan and Peter Ustinov Ustinov s film version openly acknowledged that it was based upon the [Chapman/Coxe] play', and from the novel [sic] in its opening credits According to Robert Chapman's obituary the Chapman-Coxe adaptation was extensively consulted' by Forster and Crozier when they wrote the opera libretto, and Forster corresponded with Chapman Robert Brustein et al , 'Memorial minute Robert Harris Chapman' *Harvard University Gazette*, 17 May 2001 URL www news harvard edu/gazette/2001/05 17/12-chapman html

17 For Stam (following Genette) Hypertexts are later 're-readings' (or adaptations) that are triggered by the same hypotext He adds that the diverse prior adaptations can form a larger cumulative hypotext available to the filmmaker who comes relatively late in the series Stam 'Beyond fidelity p 66

18 Here I am indebted to aspects of Murray Smith s understanding of recognition in film as the spectator's *construction* (emphasis mine) on the basis of cues offered by a film Smith *Engaging Characters Fiction Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995), p 82

19 Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film* p 44

way, the framing function of the opera's Prologue and Epilogue After a series of images and sounds which are very difficult to process narratively upon a first viewing (a tracking shot along the length of a mural depicting soldiers; men's voices singing about the Foreign Legion; young women dancing to African disco music with Legionnaires, including some who will soon become recognizable as characters; a voice shouting 'Djibouti, Djibouti', a train moving through a barren landscape, filled with people; soldiers, their torsos bared, exercising balletically in the desert to a recording on playback of the 'O Heave! O Heave Away, Heave' chorus from Act I, sc iii of Britten's opera) we are quickly introduced to the film's 'narrator'. There is a cut to an image of a diary being written; this shot is superimposed onto an image of open, sunlit water. Then the film cuts to shots of the same soldiers as before, sitting in a boat in bright sunlight, and singles out two of them in particular (these men were also shown previously moving through the disco). One of the pair (the last shown, played by Denis Lavant) stares fiercely at the other (played by Grégoire Colin) in reverse-shot. Finally, there is a cut to a shot of the older of the two men (Lavant), this time sitting outside, on a mild winter's day, writing at a table A voiceover announces:

> Marseilles, late February. I screwed up from a certain point of view. Viewpoints count. Angles of attack. My story is simple. It is the story of a man who left the army as a sergeant Chief Master Sergeant Galoup. That's me [*Galoup, c'est moi*] Unfit for life, unfit for civil life.[20]

The film will constantly shift between the two different locations and time frames that it juxtaposes in its opening minutes: the time and space of the voiceover, the writing of the diary, and the other daily activities of the man living in France; and the time and space of what is evoked in the voiceover, the remembered daily activities and events of Galoup's last days as a Legionnaire on the Gulf of Djibouti, East Africa. The voiceover continues

> And then one day a plane from France dropped off some new guys. I noticed one of them who stuck out He was thin Distant He had no reason to be with us in the Legion That's what I thought. I felt something vague and menacing take hold of me Gilles Sentain was his name The name he gave when he signed up. Maybe freedom begins with remorse . I heard that somewhere [21]

In this way, it becomes clearer that the man calling himself Galoup is remembering an earlier time in his life when he was struck by what he names later in the voiceover as jealousy towards the handsome new recruit. He also recalls his feelings at the time for his superior officer Commandant Bruno Forestier (Michel Subor) 'I admired him without knowing why. He knew I was a perfect

20 Unless otherwise indicated all quotations from the film's dialogue are taken from Andrew Litvack's subtitles to the English-language DVD version of the film distributed by Artificial Eye

21 The voiceover line Maybe freedom begins with remorse has been recognized by several critics as a quotation from Jean-Luc Godard's film *Le Petit soldat* (France, 1960), uttered by the character Bruno Forestier played by Michel Subor Subor plays the character of the same name in *Beau Travail* Roland François Lack of University College London gave a paper Endstopped intertext *Le Petit soldat* in *Beau Travail* which comprehensively examined *Beau Travail*'s evocation of *Le Petit soldat* at a symposium on *Beau Travail* at the University of Kent 2 June 2001 organized by the Queer Research Group and the Department of Film Studies

Legionnaire and he didn't give a damn.' Forestier's evident fascination with the courageous, calm and alluring Sentain (Colin) and his relative indifference towards Galoup are shown to fuel the latter's plotting against the young soldier, which will eventually lead to his successful provocation of Sentain's attack on him, and the banishment of the young soldier to the desert with a faulty compass.

As difficult as it is to distinguish between time frames, locations and the identity of secondary characters in the film's early sequences, the nature of its central triangular relationship – Galoup-Sentain-Forestier – is very quickly established. It is this piece of narrative foregrounding in a series of images and sounds otherwise difficult to motivate that might well cue knowing spectators to recall *Billy Budd, Sailor*'s *Urtext* of male desire, paranoia and jealousy, with its triangle of Claggart-Billy Budd-Captain Vere. Yet a number of aspects of Denis's and Fargeau's narrative ordering and characterological structures might work against straightforwardly encouraging this interpretation Clearly, in order for *Beau Travail*'s triangle to be regarded as a version of Melville's, its Claggart equivalent (Galoup) must be read as having substituted for the Vere character (Forestier) as the story's framing figure who survives to express remorse for what he has done In Melville's novella and its faithful hypertexts, Claggart is killed by the punch he provokes from Billy, while Vere, the only witness to the incident, orchestrates the trial that will result in the 'Handsome Sailor's' hanging and, in the opera, in Vere's shame many years later. Vere dies of wounds acquired in battle shortly after Billy's execution in the novella, the play and Ustinov's film. In Denis's film, Forestier only briefly appears to expel Galoup from the Legion after the latter has abandoned Sentain in the desert, and we see the young soldier being found and resuscitated. We learn nothing more of Forestier's fate, while Galoup survives Sentain's punch to be left with his remorse and possibly his suicidal thoughts back in civilian life in Marseilles

I would like to turn back to the film's use of musical quotation to explore further the way in which it might cue a knowing spectator's recognition of the *Billy Budd, Sailor* hypotext. Anahid Kassabian defines 'allusion' in the context of film music as a 'particular kind of [musical] quotation, that is, a quotation used to evoke another narrative . in a few seconds of film time, an allusion can evoke another whole narrative for a perceiver familiar with the excerpt'[22] I have already mentioned that *Beau Travail* begins with an allusion to Britten's opera, albeit one which is difficult to recognize as such[23] The film proceeds to borrow one further fleeting instrumental excerpt from the opera's Prologue But there are four, two-to-three-minute-long sequences spread throughout the film's duration that are played out to longer, and hence theoretically more recognizable, excerpts from Britten's *Billy Budd* In each of them, the Legionnaires are shown, in slow-panning long and medium-shots, and closeups,

22 Anahid Kassabian *Hearing Film Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York and London Routledge 2001) p 50

23 There is no musical score as such in *Beau Travail* Excerpted music includes brief sections from *Ma Lov* Eran Zur s 1998 ballet score for Bernardo Montet (the choreographer of *Beau Travail* who also appears as a member of the platoon) traditional Foreign Legion songs late 1990s afro/rai and euro dance music of Tarkan Olivier N Goma Abayazid Ali Dhable Francky Vincent Corona s *Rhythm of the Night* and Neil Young and Crazy Horse s 1994 song *Safeway Cart*

exercising against the backdrop of the desert landscape of the Gulf of Djibouti.[24] These excerpts are drawn from three different pieces of orchestral music in which a large male-voice chorus intones largely incomprehensible lyrics, or verbally inarticulate musical phrases.[25] Of all the choral excerpts used, only the two drawn from the climax of the final act could be said to have some potential to offer the spectator familiar with the opera specific story information of the kind hinted at by Kassabian. This is because, unlike the other pieces of music used, these excerpts have a very clear narrative function in their operatic context, and they also contain their own story, conveyed (prior to a wordless chorus) by the libretto, as well as by the climactic style of the music more generally. The excerpts are drawn from the moment of the execution of Billy Budd for Claggart's murder, watched by the officers and Billy's crewmates. Immediately after the execution, and despite the officers' attempts to control the situation ('Down all hands! And see that they go!'), the crew becomes mutinous, its increasingly angry mood conveyed by the murmuring chorus. The first time this excerpt is used, roughly halfway through Denis's film, it underscores a sequence in which the whole platoon is exercising, following the scene in which Galoup admits his jealousy of Sentain. Mutiny, however, is not afoot. In the second sequence in which it is used, some fifteen minutes later, it dramatically scores shots of Galoup and Sentain circling one another, their gazes locked. This sequence immediately follows on from Galoup's observation that one of the platoon, Combé, is regularly abandoning his post as night watchman during Ramadan, with Sentain's complicity, to go to the mosque to pray. This knowledge will allow Galoup to begin to plot against his young rival. Again, mutiny is not at issue. Potentially, the scenes in the film might recall a few visual or narrative motifs evoked in the libretto's stage directions to the climax of the opera's final act: for example, dawn, the time of Billy's hanging, is shown breaking at the end of the first of the two sequences; also, Forestier finds himself on his own, like Captain Vere in the opera's Epilogue which immediately follows the strange sounds of the chorus. But, in neither sequence is it the case that specific knowledge of the opera (say, of its events or characterization) is made necessary or useful *at the moment of perception of the music*.

There seems little likelihood, therefore, that the opera excerpts will lend a more filled-in backstory to the highly ambiguous, and in any case *different* events presented in the film. Whether spectators recognize the local allusion to Britten's *Billy Budd*, or whether they experience it simply as 'one-time music' in Kassabian's terms,[26] its main function, beyond signalling a continuing connection to Britten's opera, would appear to be stylistic: the excerpts provide conventionally appropriate, grandiose film music to underscore the film's loving display of beautiful male bodies and startling desert

24 From Claire Denis's comments in interviews as well as those of Denis Lavant who plays Galoup it is clear that these and many other sequences were conceived of and realized as if they were a contemporary ballet. The actors playing the Legionnaires developed and rehearsed their moves over and over again with choreographer Bernardo Montet in the Djiboutian locations with the excerpts from Britten's opera filling the desert space on playback. 'Jason Wood meets Claire Denis and Denis Lavant', *Enthusiasm*, issue 3 (Autumn/Winter 2000) p. 3.

25 There is the 'O Heave! O Heave Away, Heave' chorus from Act I sc. iii which I have already mentioned. There are two sequences which feature choral excerpts of slightly different length but both drawn from the climax of the final act of Britten's work before its brief Epilogue. Then there is a final allusion to the opera: an excerpt from the sea shanty 'Blow her to Hi-lo Riley' which closes Act II sc. ii and opens sc. iii.

26 This term refers to music that has not been heard before the first viewing of a particular scene. Kassabian, *Hearing Film*, p. 51.

***Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999). Pictures courtesy: BFI Stills.**

landscapes, as well as to emphasize the dramatic tensions of the circling sequence.[27]

In addition to these literal musical 'quotations', the film seems to engage in 'paraphrasing' certain passages or scenes from *Billy Budd, Sailor* and its hypertexts in several of its scene set-ups and situations. The film, like the hypotext as a whole, turns on one-on-one encounters and exchanges of looks between Galoup/Claggart, Sentain/Billy, and Forestier/Vere. Two of these encounters in the film clearly resemble similar incidents in each of the earlier versions of *Billy Budd*. The first occurs in a sequence one hour into *Beau Travail* in which the Commandant snatches a brief conversation with Sentain on his night-watch in which he asks him about his age. Sentain replies that he cannot be sure how old he is since he was

27 Critics who were unaware of the connection to the opera described the music as 'Wagnerian' and 'Mahlerian'. Denis worked as assistant director to Wim Wenders on his 1984 film, *Paris, Texas*.

found abandoned as a baby In each of the versions of the story from the novella onwards, Billy is asked about his age and reveals (to different characters) that he is a foundling. In the novella and the opera, Billy's interlocutor (a First Lieutenant) replies 'A pretty good find'.[28] In *Beau Travail*, Forestier replies 'At least it was a nice find'. Even if spectators do not recognize the 'source' of the phrase, it is likely that they might assume it has some significance beyond its local deployment if they are able to notice the assonant rhyming of Forestier's utterance in French (*belle trouvaille*) with the film's title[29] The second most prominent piece of paraphrasing is Sentain/Billy's blow against Galoup/Claggart: again, a story event common to all the versions, but differently narrated, or displayed with slight variations, in each of the hypertexts

There might be another kind of mimesis at work in the film, too[30] We have already seen how Britten's opera uses a framing structure that might be recalled by *Beau Travail*'s narrational choice of a voiceover[31] It is also possible to argue that the film's reconfiguration of Melville's triangle (through Galoup/Claggart's survival, and the greater prominence of his voiceover story) might recall for a knowing spectator what a number of critics have described as an 'ambiguity' presented around the motivations of Claggart and Vere at the heart of the *Billy Budd* hypotext.[32] As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asks in her brilliant analysis of Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*, why have readers found in 'Claggart the homosexual in this text, and in Vere its image of the normal' when what appears to be a simple counterpoising of the two older male characters is belied at the level of much of the novella's rhetoric?[33] This rhetoric articulates the desire that both men feel towards Billy, and also suggests that

> Claggart's impotent constricted desire [gnaws] at his own viscera, Vere's potent systemic desire [spreads out] through all the veins and fault lines of naval regulation. The most available term for Claggart's desire may be 'private', for Vere's 'public'.[34]

The film might also recall another, more pervasive form of rhetorical ambiguity in the novella, although this time not one shared by the faithful hypertexts Elsewhere in Sedgwick's study of nineteenth-century 'closeted' literary discourse, of which, for her, *Billy Budd, Sailor* is an example, she notes the prominence of the rhetorical figures of preterition (the summary mention of something while one pretends to pass over it) and periphrasis (circumlocution)[35] While it would be useful to pay greater attention to ontological specificities in the comparison of different media than I have the space for here, it can be argued that *Beau Travail*'s adoption of many of the narrational conventions of the art film has a similar effect[36] The film tells its story through ellipses, redundancies and a consistent preference for the connotation of potential meanings through the juxtaposition of images and sounds, without always

28 Melville *Billy Budd Sailor* p 287 Act I of Britten s opera

29 One critic has it that *Beau Travail*'s title is taken from the novella Jean-Luc Nancy 'L'Areligion *Vacarme* janvier 2000 URL www vacarme eu org/ article84 html I shall return to the question of film s title

30 Here I am indebted to Roland-François Lack's notion of 'mimetism in his unpublished paper Endstopped intertext *Le Petit soldat* in *Beau Travail*' I use mimesis here to describe narrational resemblances between hypotext and hypertext (or between hypertext and hypertext)

31 Melville s novella and Ustinov s film both employ an omniscient narrator – an I narrator throughout the novella and an impersonal male voiceover at the beginning and end of the film

32 For example of the opera s climax Philip Brett writes, 'Britten seems to be admitting in this final moment that the captain [Vere] is every bit as destructive as his less ambiguously homosexual (and evil) master-at-arms John Claggart Brett Britten s dream in Ruth A Solie (ed) *Musicology and Difference Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1993) p 266

33 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Epistemology of the Closet* (London Penguin, 1990) p 109

34 Ibid , p 109 Interestingly the homoerotic desire that seems clearly articulated by the film s many exchanges of male-on-male gazes in the Djiboutian sequences is not as unambiguously expressed in Galoup s voiceover or in the film s dialogue Galoup has a Djiboutian girlfriend Rahel (Marta Tafesse Kassa) towards whom he

providing a clear, explanatory or causal framework. As D A. Miller writes, following Barthes:

> Connotation . . . excites the desire for proof, a desire that, so long as it develops within the connotative register, tends to draft every signifier into what nonetheless remains a hopeless task. Hence the desire assumes another, complementary form in the dream . . that connotation would quit its dusky existence for fluorescent literality, *would become denotation*.[37]

Among its many ambiguities and ambivalences, *Beau Travail* frequently hints at backstories or pre-texts to its characters and events by means of its numerous iconic and auditory allusions to the *Billy Budd, Sailor* hypotext, and its more limited acts of narrative and situational mimesis. But, as I hope to have shown in particular with regard to the film's deployment of music from the opera, the desire for denotation is stymied The cues lead to none of the story-information spectators might have conventionally come to expect of transtextuality Even the least veiled of the references to the novella, (the film's central triangle of characters, for instance) are required to perform very little in the way of pointing to, clarifying or filling out anything, beyond perhaps the ambiguity and ambivalence of their original source. How can they when, as Sedgwick writes of Melville's text, 'the narrative has gone to considerable lengths to invite . . the reading in which Claggart represents a pure *epistemological essence*, a form and a theory of knowing untinctured by the actual stuff that he knows or comprises'?[38] Unlike the faithful hypertexts of Melville's work, I would contend that, despite their ontological differences, the epistemological structures of the novella and of *Beau Travail* encourage a similarly paranoid hermeneutics. This, one could argue, might make *Beau Travail* the most faithful of all adaptations of *Billy Budd, Sailor* so far, were it not the case that its many differences from the Melville text make it difficult to entertain the idea that this was its intention. The performative function of the clearly communicated intention of a film to be received as an adaptation will figure centrally in what follows

Trading upon the memory

You have to help the critics over their notices, right?[39]

After *Beau Travail* premiered at the Venice Film Festival on September 4 1999, it enjoyed a fairly widespread release in France (from May 2000 onwards), as well as a much more limited international release, playing mainly to metropolitan art houses and independent cinemas throughout 2000 and early 2001. While it was a moderate box-office success for a film with a fairly low budget,[40] it

behaves very tenderly while both Forestier and Sentain are shown to avoid female company The latter is though resuscitated by a woman at the end of the film

35 While Sedgwick discusses these figures in connection with Henry James s story The beast in the closet I would ague that they are equally present throughout *Billy Budd Sailor* Sedgwick *Epistemology of the Closet* pp 201–12

36 My understanding of the narrational conventions of art cinema is greatly indebted to the typology provided by David Bordwell s chapter Art-cinema narration in *Narration in the Fiction Film* pp 205–33

37 D A Miller Anal *Rope* in Diana Fuss (ed) *Inside/Out* (London Routledge 1991) p 125

38 Sedgwick *Epistemology of the Closet* p 96

39 Claude Chabrol Chabrol talks to Rui Nogueira and Nicoletta Zalaffi *Sight and Sound* vol 40 no 1 (1970–71) p 6 cited in David Bordwell *Making Meaning Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press 1989) p 210

40 It was premiered on 31 March 2000 in the USA and grossed some $270 000 Its UK release was on 16 July 2000 and it grossed approximately £150,000 Figures from URL www imdb com/Business?0209933 and www the_numbers_com/movies/2000/0BTRV html

was reviewed very widely, and on the whole very admiringly, in the quality print and broadcast media around the world, as well as on the internet Denis, whose only international art-house success prior to *Beau Travail* was her first feature film *Chocolat* (France, 1988), also set in Africa, was endlessly feted as an auteur at international previews, premieres, retrospectives of her considerable body of work, and festivals, often in the presence of her actors as well as her cinematographer Agnès Godard I shall examine Denis's own direct media interventions in interviews on the subject of her film later But first I wish to explore some of the claims made more generally about the status of *Beau Travail* as a free adaptation in the discourses of promotion and reception that surrounded it. As I indicated in my introduction, free adaptations *manifest* their flexibility with regard to certain of the generic conventions of the literary adaptation. They might be usefully regarded for my purposes here, then, as films in the viewing of which the knowing spectator feels free to make use *or not* of any intertextual cues that might suggest themselves. This being the case, reviewers are also at liberty to make use of these cues in their assessments of such films Yet, while *Beau Travail*'s status as a free adaptation was far from all that its reviews dwelled upon,[41] it was one of their most consistent topics. Why was this?

Before the film's premiere at the Venice Biennale, no published discourse issuing from Pyramide Films, the small French distribution company responsible for its domestic marketing, declared the film to be an adaptation of Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* At that stage, only two elements of *Beau Travail*'s pre-release intertextual relay drew an explicit connection to Melville's work (though not directly to his novella) or to Britten's *Billy Budd* These were the film's final music credits, which listed Britten's opera,[42] and the home page of Pyramide Films' official French language website for *Beau Travail*, which reproduced a poem by Herman Melville [43] The remaining pages of the website (and of the press pack derived from similar material) consisted of technical and release information for the film, filmographies for Denis, the main actors and principal crew, a downloadable trailer and excerpts from the soundtrack, information about the Foreign Legion, and, of course, a synopsis.[44]

The ambivalence of those responsible for the domestic marketing of the film towards encouraging the reception of *Beau Travail* even as a free adaptation of *Billy Budd, Sailor* was superseded by the attitude of those responsible for selling and distributing it outside of France [45] By the time of the film's premiere, the extensive entry on Denis's film in the Biennale festival programme included a new credit used neither in the film nor in its promotional website: 'Soggetto dalla novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* di Herman Melville'. While the programme adopted wholesale the synopsis of the film and much of the other information provided in its press pack and on its website, it also added the following statement attributed to Claire Denis

41 It was routinely discussed in the context of gay cinema women s cinema Denis s cinema postcolonial cinema and art cinema as well as with regard to its other prominent intertexts such as *Le Petit soldat* and *Morocco* (Joseph von Sternberg 1930) There is much more to be said about these aspects of the film and the ways in which they intersect with the film s auteurism and its interpretation as an adaptation

42 Denis and her music consultant, Charles Henri de Pierrefeu had to purchase the rights to Britten's opera Melville s novella is out of copyright

43 The poem reproduced is The Night-March With banners furled and clarions mute / An army passes in the night / And beaming spears and helms salute / The dark with bright In silence deep the legions stream / With open ranks in order true, / Over boundless plains they stream and gleam / No chief in view! Afar in twinkling distance lost / (So legends tell) he lonely wends / And back through all that shining host / his mandate sends See URL www pyramidefilms com/beautravail Other press releases and Denis herself in interviews also cited Gold in the Mountains Gold in the mountain / Gold in the glen / And greed in the heart / Heaven having no part / And unsatisfied men These poems are reproduced in full in English in 'Jason Wood meets Claire Denis and Denis Lavant *Enthusiasm* p 3

44 A forgotten platoon in the Foreign Legion abandoned somewhere in the Gulf of Djibouti The remains of a phantom army playing at war and repairing roads In Marseilles ex-Chief Master Sergeant Galoup remembers these happy times He remembers the well-organized life his men his beloved company But what he has really lost is his Commandant The Commandant he did not want to share with a young Legionnaire Translation mine

45 Mercure Distribution New Yorker

Films (which had distributed Denis's 1994 *J'ai pas sommeil* in the USA) Artificial Eye Film Company and Fox World Cinema among others

> Because I know Djbouti [sic], because I know the space the Foreign Legion occupies at Djbouti and also because I have always been struck by the absolutism, by the extreme needs that the Legion instils in its men, I have tried to make the umpteenth adaptation of *Billy Budd, Sailor* with the action in Djbouti. Two poems by Melville have been fundamental in this work The Night March . . and Gold in the Mountain.[46]

46 Clumsily translated into English from Italian in the bilingual programme of the Official Section of La Biennale di Venezia 1999 Programme information accessed online from the Archives for 1999 at URL www.labiennaledivenezia.net/filmbiennale

One month after its Venice premiere *Beau Travail* was shown in the main programme at the New York Film Festival, where New Yorker Films acquired it for American theatrical distribution. This time, the film's programme entry was less recognizably lifted from its own promotional material. While the two Melville poems were reproduced again – introduced this time by the title 'A note from Claire Denis' – a synopsis of the film was clearly written especially for the occasion. It opened with the words 'Inspired by Herman Melville's "Billy Budd"'.[47]

47 Available at URL www.archivefilminc.com/nyff/nyfffilms99.htm

Why might those responsible for selling *Beau Travail* internationally have wished to capitalize on a less ambiguous connection to Melville's novella than their 'domestic' counterparts? This is a difficult question to answer with any certainty. It seems clear, nonetheless, that Denis's work was fairly well known in France, the lead actors in the film were nationally very well known, and the film had an appeal beyond an art-cinema niche with its story of the *French* Foreign Legion Outside of France, where these factors counted for less, more clearly defined niche marketing had to become the principal selling strategy. Trading upon the memory of the film's literary connections to the anglophone *Billy Budd* hypotext became an important tactic, alongside those of selling the film as a beautiful art film, of promoting it to the gay market on the grounds of its homoeroticism and queerness, and of capitalizing on the relative rarity of Denis as a woman filmmaker making a film predominantly about men in a postcolonial setting. Interestingly, *Beau Travail* was competing in the international film marketplace at roughly the same time as another French 'Melville adaptation': *Pola X* (France/Germany/Japan/Switzerland, 1999), a version of *Pierre Or the Ambiguities*, an 1852 novel by Herman Melville, directed by Léos Carax.[48] Carax's film was released considerably earlier in France, though, where it won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in May 1999. Perhaps the timing of the two films' release might hint at another reason why those marketing *Beau Travail* chose initially not to launch it as *yet another* Melville adaptation, one by a director whose career in some respects shadowed that of Léos Carax. Prior to the success of *Beau Travail*, Carax was better known both inside and outside France than Denis.[49]

48 Carax's film is a free adaptation but somewhat less so than *Beau Travail* The film was marketed as a Melville adaptation ('Pola is an acronym of *Pierre ou les ambiguïtés* but a longer version of the film was broadcast on *Arte* under the original title in September 2001) Its main swerve from the novel was to move its story to present-day Paris

49 Carax's film was co-written by Denis's co-writer Jean-Pôl Fargeau and edited by her editor Nelly Quettier In the same way that Grégoire Colin (Sentain) is well known as one of Denis's and Agnès Godard's *acteurs-fétiche* Denis Lavant (Galoup) became known through his association with Carax Denis mentions Carax's film in at least two interviews Jason Wood meets Claire Denis and Denis Lavant *Enthusiasm* p 5 and Ce poids d'ici-bas entretien avec Claire Denis *Vacarme* Janvier 2000 I am indebted to James S Williams for his very suggestive remarks about auteurism in contemporary French cinema

Despite the contingency of all of the claims that can be made about *Beau Travail*'s transtextuality, reviewers were considerably less

hesitant in their assertions about the film's relationship with Melville's novella than those who produced the film initially were [50] Critics did vary in the degree to which they saw it as an adaptation, however. The *Sight and Sound* review in August 2000 had it that the 'obvious dramatic models for *Beau Travail*'s jealousy-fuelled narrative are *Othello*, Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (Benjamin Britten's music for the opera based on Melville's novella dashes gloomy panic into our ears) and Greek tragedy'.[51] Shortly after the New York premiere, the South African gay website *q online* noted that the film 'is an impressionistic take on a famous novel, in this case Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*'.[52] Claire Vassé wrote to conclude her review in *Positif* that the film was 'très librement inspiré de poèmes de Herman Melville et de son roman *Billy Budd, marin*, *Beau Travail* en retient néanmoins l'essentiel'/'very freely inspired by poems by Herman Melville and by his novel [sic] *Billy Budd, Sailor*, *Beau Travail* retains their essential qualities, nonetheless' [53] While the review in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* on the occasion of the Australian release in May 2001 noted that 'Denis has borrowed from Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, taking its three central characters, plot outline and sense of repressed love and jealousy. She has changed its location, tone and ending, and made it her own.'[54] After the American release from April/May 2000 onwards, it would seem from most of the reviews that it was now a very widely accepted fact that *Beau Travail was* an adaptation, albeit a free or loose one. For example, the November 2000 review for *6degrees* boldly begins 'Inspired by Herman Melville . . this adaptation of *Billy Budd* . . .'.[55] In its capsule review of *Beau Travail*, a French government website called the film 'an adaptation of two versions of *Billy Budd* [the novella and the opera], Denis adopts the *Billy Budd* story wholesale' [56] The review in *Cineaste* reads 'Adapting *Billy Budd* is no easy task but here [Denis] succeeds with grandeur in terms of the totality of her achievement'.[57]

These elements of the film's intertextual relay do not *describe* the knowledge that *Beau Travail* is a loose adaptation of Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*.[58] In a very practical sense, they *determine* that knowledge In theory, a spectator who is unfamiliar with *Billy Budd, Sailor* or its hypertexts will not recognize any related intertextual cues in *Beau Travail*, especially since the film does not point them up in the conventional way of adaptations. Yet, the likelihood of such an unknowing spectator seeing the film without first having been alerted to the film's status as a free adaptation by its intertextual relay is small. Even if spectators initially do not share even the generally circulated cultural memory of the film's intertext, their experience of viewing *Beau Travail* will be shaped by the widely circulated discourses ascribing it to the subgenre of the free adaptation

This is because the intertextual relay does not only prime or hail

50 After examining a sample of some three-hundred reviews of *Beau Travail* from fifteen countries I was only able to locate around a dozen (usually capsule reviews) that did not make any mention of Melville or *Billy Budd Sailor*

51 Charlotte O'Sullivan *'Beau Travail', Sight and Sound* (August 2000) p 39

52 Paul Peterson *Three Gay Films at the New York Film Festival* URL www q co za/culture/film/991004-nycfilm htm

53 Claire Vassé *Beau Travail* Liberté du corps *Positif* no 471 (May 200) p 31

54 Philippa Hawker Review of *Beau Travail* *The Age* 17 May 2001 URL www theage com au

55 Will McKenzie *Beau Travail* URL www 6degrees co uk/en/2/200011vrbeau html (November 2000)

56 French Cultural Services, *Beau Travail* URL www frenchculture org/cinema/releases/denis html

57 George Rafael *Beau Travail* *Cineaste* vol XXV no 4 (2000) p 41

58 The majority of the film s reviewers rarely provide evidence for their assertions or give a source (such as the press pack they nearly all received or the numerous interviews with the director) to back up their claims *Beau Travail's* epistemological status as an adaptation, therefore often takes the form of an 'open secret the social function of which is not the concealment of knowledge so much as the concealment of *knowledge of* the knowledge See D A Miller *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1988) p 206

spectators to receive *Beau Travail* as an adaptation, encouraging them to 'motivate [their reading of the film] transtextually'; it also trains them in how to receive it in this way. To take one example, several of the critics who saw the film at the New York Film Festival later wrote long reviews for the quality press on the occasion of its theatrical release in the US in April and May 2000. The approaches of these long reviews of the film bear a striking resemblance to the methodologies of adaptation criticism in academic film studies. For example, they adopt similar rhetorical and evidential strategies. Kent Jones writes in *Film Comment* of 'Claggart/Galoup', and 'Sentain/Billy'[59] In his admiring and eloquent review in the *Chicago Reader*, Jonathan Rosenbaum considers the director's 'cinematic, literary, [and] musical background', and reproduces the Melville poems cited by her as 'direct inspirations', even as he asserts that they are 'no more necessary' to appreciate this movie.[60] In a brilliant review for *Salon.com*, Charles Taylor ponders at length the differences and similarities between novella and film and finds that 'there's no sense that Galoup is in love with [Sentain] as Claggart is in love with Billy'[61] Occasionally, the reviewers even cite one another[62] In their detailed ruminations on *Billy Budd, Sailor*, these and other critics make an important contribution to the general circulation of the cultural memory of the novella. They prepare spectators to receive what they determine as the film's fidelities to its source text, as well as its swerves away from it They contribute to a bank of constantly circulating discourse that might provide a back-story to the film and its characters for its spectators in ways, I have argued, which are avoided by the film. And, above all, they set out in the example of their own critical practice a range of legitimate cultural activities to perform in the reception (in a broad sense) of a free adaptation[63]

The most authoritative legitimation of film interpretations in the contemporary commerce of auteurism,[64] however, is conventionally provided by the discourse of the director Charles Taylor's opinion about Claire Denis's reluctance to 'impose interpretations of motives or psychology' is perfectly demonstrable in terms of *Beau Travail*'s formal structures and 'all the work it makes you do just to make sense of its way of seeing'[65] But it does not apply with as much force in respect of many of the interventions attributed to her in interviews about her film For Corrigan, the directorial interview 'is where the auteur, in addressing cults of fans and critical viewers, can engage and disperse his or her own organising agency as auteur . writing and explaining a film through the promotion of a certain intentional self'.[66]

Denis participated in numerous interviews with journalists from commercial film magazines and newspaper cultural supplements about *Beau Travail*. In most, if not all, of these, she chose to tell roughly the same stories about the film and her 'intentions'. Almost

59 Kent Jones The dance of the unknown soldier *Film Comment* May/June 2000, p 27

60 Jonathan Rosenbaum, Unsatisfied men *Chicago Reader* 2000 URL www chireader com/movies/archives/2000/0500/00526_2 html

61 Taylor, *Beau Travail*, pp 1–2 No reviewer considered the opera as an important narrative influence in detail and very rarely was Ustinov's film mentioned

62 At least two reviewers cite Kent Jones s *Film Comment* review Rosenbaum Unsatisfied men', David Perry *Beau Travail Xinbaro Newsletter*, vol 2, no 32 (2000) URI www cinema-scene com/index html

63 Examples include *looking to* recognize the source acknowledgement of similarities and differences and exploration of the aesthetic and narrative motivations of similarities and especially differences among others

64 Corrigan *A Cinema Without Walls* pp 101–36

65 Taylor *Beau Travail* pp 1–2

66 Corrigan *A Cinema Without Walls* pp 108–9

all of her interviewers would have known about these already because they had been set out in the film's promotional material The most prominently repeated stories, if ones rarely told in detail, are on the subject of the film's commissioning by the French/German television station Arte, which wanted her to make a film about foreignness, the process of filming with her actors in Djibouti, Denis's childhood in West Africa, and her return to France, her filmmaking career; the two Melville poems (and sometimes his work more generally), and Britten's music But there is often some slight preterition and periphrasis on the part both of Denis and of her interviewers in the matter of whether or not *Beau Travail* is an adaptation. For *Sight and Sound*, Chris Darke asked her 'what attracted you to Herman Melville?'.[67] While in an interview for *Enthusiasm*, the promotional magazine of Artificial Eye, which secured the UK release of the film, Denis was asked why she thinks Melville is such a popular author to adapt. She replied: 'Melville has always been a popular author with artists, obviously with Britten, with painters and filmmakers. *Moby Dick* has been made into a film and now *Billy Budd* for a second time. . . . If I had not been asked by Arte, I would never have done it, not another adaptation of Melville because I felt that Genet's adaptation – *Querelle* – was the natural end to it.'[68]

In addition to interviews like these that were very clearly part of Denis's promotional commitments, she also gave a number of 'in-depth' interviews quite late on in the film's programme of theatrical releases for a number of non-commercial or very small circulation journals.[69] In these exchanges she explores the connections with Melville and Britten at much greater length. In an interview for an issue of the French cultural journal *Barca!*, Denis gives full voice to her opinions about Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*, citing Deleuze's work on the American author as well as several other stories by Melville of relevance to her film, such as 'Benito Cereno'.[70] While she evinces a lack of interest in Melville's characters Vere and Billy, she discusses the ambiguity of their relationship, comparing its presentation in the novella and the opera But she calls Claggart 'un vrai personnage melvillien'/'a true Melvillian character', and describes how she decided to allow her story to 'go towards' him '*Galou* [sic], *c'est moi*'.[71] She also discusses at length Britten's music and how she used less well known aspects of the novella in scenes in her film [72] She finally avows that:

> [Mon travail] C'est une adaptation de Melville, il y a un respect et un hommage à Melville *Billy Budd* est la fin de la vie de Melville, à un moment où il s'est vécu comme un écrivain raté, et ayant raté sa vie Et cette douleur de Melville, j'ai essayé de la mettre en son
>
> [My work] is an adaptation of Melville, there is a respect and a

67 Denis replies I always thought of Herman Melville as a brother in the sense of sharing his feelings of sadness nostalgia and disappointment, the sense of having lost something Chris Darke 'Desire is violence *Sight and Sound* (July 2000) p 17

68 This is the only mention made by Denis about Ustinov's film Jason Wood meets Claire Denis and Denis Lavant *Enthusiasm* p 5

69 That is not to say that interviews in such journals do not contribute to the promotion of the film One such interview I am unable to discuss in detail here is "Ce poids d ici-bas" entretien avec Claire Denis *Vacarme*, janvier 2000 In this interview Denis is asked to respond to an article on her film published in the same issue – 'L Areligion by Jean-Luc Nancy – in which Nancy performs the most detailed comparison of Melville's novella and Denis's film I have seen He makes the observation that the film's title *does* come from the novella (the phrase Handsomely done! uttered by Claggart to Billy as he spills his soup in *Billy Budd Sailor* p 306) While Denis only half confirms some of the details of Nancy's argument she does discuss his understanding of her film as an adaptation repeating many of the details from the *Barca!* interview (see fn 70)

70 Le Cinéma doit nous mener au mystère de ce que les personnages taisent *Barca! Poésie politique psychanalyse* (November 2000), pp 117–44 Thanks to Ian Christie for giving me a copy of this interview and also to Forbes Morlock and James S Williams for passing on other interviews and material

71 Ibid p 120

72 For example the mysterious procession of Legionnaires during which a young black man is held aloft is taken from the introduction to the novella Ibid p 129 In the interview with *Vacarme* however she declares that the only event [from the novella] which I respected is the punch (p 4)

homage to him *Billy Budd* is the end of Melville's life when he experiences his failure as a writer, a failure in his life. And it is his pain that I have tried to render in sound.[73]

The space offered by small-circulation journals with their highly-educated, often opinion-forming readerships enables Denis to expound at length on the rationale of her fidelities to and her swerves from *Billy Budd, Sailor*. But it also allows her to demonstrate her brilliance as a filmmaker, and to reveal her expertise as an interpreter of Melville's work and of the criticism and theory about it. She shows that there is little in her film, or in its relationship with Melville's work, that has not been the result of much thought and artistry. Like the critics who published the more substantial appraisals of her film, and whose arguments demonstrate their own special skill and sensitivity as Melville readers as well as art film reviewers, Denis's discourse authorizes the film's potential spectators to become expert readers themselves. The ambiguity and the clarity about the transtextuality of *Beau Travail*, performed on occasion to different audiences, both serve useful promotional purposes While literary adaptations are usually seen, by film producers and audiences, as prestige products, there is a greater association with 'prestige' to be achieved from the 'originality' and 'difficulty' of auteurist free adaptations – especially of the rhetorically complex work of an author like Herman Melville – than from supposedly straightforward, or 'slavish' imitations. For a film like *Beau Travail* with its very moderate box-office success, there is a need for a long shelf-life to maximise its financial return at the same time as its cultural capital And, as an auteurist or art cinema product (also a gay, postcolonial and women's product, according to the broader discourses on the film), it has the potential to achieve this The deserved consecration of *Beau Travail* as one of 'the best films of the 1990s' coincided with its release on video and DVD in early 2001 The packaging of these versions can now clearly recognize that *Beau Travail* is 'inspired by' and 'freely adapted from *Billy Budd* by Herman Melville'

In her essay on *J'ai pas sommeil/I'm Not Sleepy*, a film directed by Claire Denis in 1993, Cynthia Marker puts forward the argument that it is 'a contemporary film noir that resists being a film noir – a film that, in essence, masquerades as a genre it is in the process of subverting . the elusive film style precludes facile generic categorizations'.[74] It might be tempting to conclude, similarly, that with its elusive textuality *Beau Travail* is an adaptation that resists being an adaptation To paraphrase Corrigan, *Beau Travail* certainly befuddles many interpretive readings in its promise of textual secrets that 'can never be semiotically discovered or designated' [75] We can

73 Le Cinema doit nous mener p 135 In the *Vacarme* interview, however Denis notes of her adaptation, 'fidele n est pas le mot Plus proche / Faithful isn't the word Rather, closer ('Ce poids d ici-bas p 4)

74 Cynthia Marker Sleepless in Paris *J ai pas sommeil* in Phil Powrie (ed) *French Cinema in the 1990s* (Oxford Oxford University Press 1999) p 147

75 Corrigan *A Cinema Without Walls*, p 55 I am not arguing here that the film cannot be interpreted' it seems to me to be considerably less ambiguous about its evocation of the redundancy of the French Foreign Legion (with its rusting tanks and aircraft – thanks to Barney Taylor for this point) and of the hostility of some Djiboutians to the European presence in their country (for example the woman who throws a stone at the army truck carrying the film crew) than it is in its sexual politics or about the status of its many intertexts

never be completely sure of what is to be gained narratively by recognizing *Billy Budd* in *Beau Travail*. But, while the film's form may seem to resist the narrative motivations provided by 'facile generic categorization', the film as a whole, as a product of the 'commerce of auteurism', cannot resist taking its place among the discourses of promotion and reception which evoke, for different audiences in different ways, appropriate horizons of expectations and rules of the game. These discourses not only appear to provide unknowing spectators with the competence to read the film as an adaptation, but they also contribute to 'filling in' the always partial knowledge of knowing spectators. Recognizing *Billy Budd* in *Beau Travail* is therefore, first and foremost, a matter of *avowal*. The performative act of avowing a free relationship between the two texts seems to anchor the film's paranoid hermeneutics, and activates a mode of reading in which it (if not its narrative) is (more) intelligible

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reports and debates

Crashing Out

MARTIN BARKER

It is now four years since the considerable crisis that pervaded British cinema politics finally juddered to a halt and David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) was released at last to the screens, uncut, and certified '18' The controversy lasted exactly a year In June 1996, Alexander Walker published his condemnation of the film in the *London Evening Standard*[1] Following a longish pause, the *Daily Mail* – from the same publishing stable – took up the cause, albeit much more crudely, and mounted a steadily intensifying campaign to block the film's release. Repeated front-page banner headlines combined with attempts to use MPs and other political figures as opinion conduits, approaches to every local authority in the country seeking action against the film, and journalists door-stepping individual examiners from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) Although in the end their campaign failed, the toxins they implanted were mightily effective. *Crash* did very badly when released In many places, multiplexes booked the film, probably hoping that the controversy would have stimulated a perverse wish to see it. When the opposite happened, the *Mail* claimed a kind of victory The British public, about whose vulnerability they had been panicking for a year, suddenly proved to have the 'commonsense' necessary to reject the film.

In late 1996, with two colleagues, I won an ESRC grant to study the campaign, how it was organized discursively, how it impacted on audiences' expectations and, once they saw the film, in what different ways people responded to it The main findings of our research are being published this autumn[2] I want here to reflect on some uncomfortable questions the research raises for film studies itself, and not least for the role of a journal such as *Screen*

1 Alexander Walker 'A movie beyond the bounds of depravity', *Evening Standard*, 3 June 1996

2 Martin Barker Jane Arthurs and Ramaswami Harindranath *The Crash Controversy Film Censorship and Audience Reception* (London Wallflower Press 2001)

Our research showed that the *Mail* was able to dominate almost entirely the manner in which the film was debated. The terms of reference which the *Mail* established (even more, in fact, than Walker's own) drove the film's defenders to answer in *its* terms, to their considerable weakening How did this happen? Largely, I am arguing, because too few voices were willing to bring to the film other forms of discussion, other clear and comprehensible lines of understanding A small number of media academics (most notably Julian Petley) spoke up during the controversy . . . a very small number. But unless I am very mistaken, there was not one specifically film academic among them. Why? Where were we all? The sheer overwhelming silence is so striking – it surely invites consideration of the public position of film theory and research

It is an irony that the last twenty-five years have seen film studies in the UK largely dominated by a claim that film analysis is inextricably political To analyze films is to bring to light, variously, ideological formations or spectatorial positionings with cultural, social and political resonances Films embody culturally significant representations To analyze films is to explore forces functioning to form cultural identities Make your choice among these, it hardly matters – all these are bids for the wider political significance of film studies. Yet faced with a *real* political controversy lasting a full year, it seems we had nothing to contribute. How do we explain this?

Of course many explanations are possible It might simply have been nervousness and unease at speaking out in public – although film studies itself generally disallows personalized explanations of this kind. It might have been a belief that the crisis would soon blow over, or that the BBFC would surely come out right in the end – a tough one, that, given the depth of suspicion of 'institutions' in our field. It might have been a case of 'over-specialization', a sense that (as one colleague honestly put it to me) this is not 'my kind of film, my area of film studies' It might of course be unease at the film, at its particular cinematic examination of sexuality. Any or all of these may be true But I am most interested in another and more disturbing possibility – that film studies was disabled from speaking on the issue because its dominant conceptualizations effectively *collude* with the position taken by the *Daily Mail*

What was the *Mail*'s argumentative framework? That films are a particularly powerful form of culture because they are so *visual*. This makes cinematic display of sexuality particularly dangerous because it can bypass our rational veneer That the emotional arousal, or 'heat', this generates is dangerous just because it is 'hot' – and the effort made by defenders in the UK to prove how 'cool' the film was thus reveals its discursive dependence. That this means that there will be some – vulnerable, immature, partly-formed – who will be especially vulnerable to the 'messages' contained in what the film *shows* We do not need ever to *find* such people – we are entitled to

impute their possible existence and draw word-cartoons of them. That this will work if these viewers are led to *identify* with these degraded characters. That 'we', the educated, the well-informed, the ones with insight, cannot shirk our duties to display what we can see but they cannot: the messages which subvert; the subtexts which influence even as they are not seen. In various ways, and with inputs from some 'experts', the *Mail* argued all these – or, interestingly, in the case of the dangers of the 'heat' of films did not need ever to argue it explicitly – yet the film's defenders 'knew' to deny it by asserting *Crash*'s coolness, its iciness. If semiotics can teach us anything, it is to detect the force of unstated yet acknowledged discursive meanings.

Now, bowdlerizing just a little, what are the current presumptions of much film studies? That films are primarily *visual* exercises – hence all the talk of 'point of view', of spectatorship, or the problems of visual pleasure, and so on? A vast amount of film analysis has presumed that our visual relationship to films simultaneously positions us and enmeshes us It is this belief which grounds the supposed *persuasiveness* of films, their capacity to engage our 'identities', to act as mirrors (again the 'looking' involved) back to our forming selves. It is through such mechanisms that the symbolic formations of films, their subtexts, their 'messages' are conveyed to those primal parts of our minds which operate behind and below the 'rational' levels. The term most used for this process of engagement and entrapment? 'Identification'. And even from time to time comes the acknowledgement that the only 'safe' films, those which will engender critical reflection and distance, are those which refuse identification, remain 'cool', deny pleasure The match, to me, is very striking. How did this all work with *Crash*?

Screen published five articles on *Crash* during and after the controversy One was essentially a descriptive recounting of the controversy [3] The others were pretty typical examples of 'film analysis' That is, they set about searching for a meaning and significance in the film, deploying for this purpose sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit concepts and methods.[4] Two of them did note in passing that there was indeed a controversy – but that was all Film analysis has other priorities These were to use the special expertise of film analytics to prise out the subtexts, and perhaps even to 'name' who might be influenced – and thus to judge the film. Whatever the differences from the *Mail* in other respects, in one crucial respect at least there was real commonality: in the will to operate with untested 'figures of the audience', to claim the power to know how audiences must respond to the film because the analyst – who has not of course responded in this way at all – nonetheless has the power to impute these responses to those who will not be allowed to speak for themselves.

In a controversy piece, with a word-limit, I can only partly

3 Annette Kuhn *Crash* and film censorship, *Screen* vol 40 no 4 (1999) pp 446–51 The strange thing though is how disconnected this essay is from Kuhn's previous superb work on the discursive formations of film censorship in her *Cinema Censorship and Sexuality 1909–1925* (London Routledge 1988)

4 Barbara Creed, Anal wounds metallic kisses *Screen* vol 39 no 2 (1998) pp 175–9 Michael Grant Crimes of the future' *Screen* vol 39 no 2 (1998) pp 180–5 Fred Botting and Scott Wilson Automatic lover *Screen* vol 39 no 2 (1998) pp 186–92 Marq Smith Wound envy *Screen* vol 40 no 2 (1999) pp 193–202

demonstrate my case. I have chosen just one of the four analyses to illustrate my point. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson deconstruct *Crash* mercilessly. As they put it: '*Crash* combines the stylized ennui of a seventies German urban alienation film with the grainy, low-tech, humourless repetition of a seventies German porn film.'[5] This scorning of the film should, one might suppose, lead to its dismissal – a film this poor surely can't merit much attention? Its distinguishing feature must surely be its failure to signify very much at all. Not so *Crash*'s very poverty made it part of a (Foucauldian) nightmare. Its cold address to sex thus signalled a disciplinary regime – put the plebs off their sex, so that they learn to police themselves: 'the increasing juridical, governmental and corporate concern . . with unauthorized incursions into the "personal space" of employees (particularly sexual harassment) has, in common with *Crash*, the close identification of work and *jouissance* and an interest in intensifying sex, and the social activities around it, as something that may seriously damage your health – or psyche.'[6] Here the sexual alienation becomes symptomatic, a marker of a desire to control and snuff out presumably otherwise resistant desires

5 Botting and Wilson Automatic lover p 186

6 Ibid p 190

How did they know this? What warranted this move? The concept that does the work for them is, no surprise, the concept of 'identification' Yet the concept is used quite weirdly Here is the first main use: 'Elias Koteas's performance of Vaughan as the dangerously charismatic, virile American is so excessive . as to successfully hint at the deficiency that determines his obsession. Far from being the intoxicating, sinister figure he appears to be for Helen Remington and the Ballards, he merely evokes incredulity, and fails to provide the point of identification that could enliven his project for a cinema audience.'[7] So, the 'audience' is here 'known' 'They' will fail to identify But in that case we are back with the paradox if it fails to provide such a point of identification, and 'identification' is understood to be the means by which signification is 'transferred' from text to audience, how on earth can it achieve meaningfulness?

7 Ibid p 187

The answer lies in a further stage of imputation: the audience which 'fails to identify' is thus left walking around with its needs for identification left unfulfilled The vessels were not left empty, but rather seething 'As scar-screens, the empty units of visual identification ("characters" is too strong a word) are marked by the traces of an unspeakable automotive *jouissance* unavailable to a human culture determined by the restricted economy of the pleasure principle. . Without any privileged place of identification, the film is plotted along a chain of scars signifying the displacement of the fetish from its "original" location as the substitute for maternal lack, to a fetishistic repetition and universalization of lack all figures are all-too-obviously castrated '[8]

8 Ibid p 188

The logic of this complaint fascinates me. The *Mail* and its sympathizers saw the problem in *Crash* as its potential generation of

heat: arousal in some people somewhere of a combination of perverse sexual arousal and excitement at car crashes In response, the film's defenders argued that the film was 'too cool' to arouse, to evoke the kinds of 'identification' that could enable this.[9] Now along come film analysts turning the *failure* to produce 'identification' into another species of harm. The common threads? That untested notion of 'identification', which hangs on in there within film studies as a hardly-considered, never-tested bogus necessity.[10] And those imputations about some never-identified, never-researched – indeed, just never asked – 'audience' – who are never the analysts, who have risen above such vulnerability, and thus speak from a pastoral position.

So what is this 'figure of the audience'? Cinemagoers may have *thought* they go to see *Crash* for all kinds of reasons (to check out the latest Cronenberg film, to find out what the fuss was all about, to make their own minds up, to see if it could help exorcise memories of an actual car crash, and so on – these are among the many real reasons we encountered in our research) But according to this reading, what actually drives the encounter with the film is a search for 'identification' Having gone with deep needs requiring attention, what they got instead was 'castrated' characters, fetishistic fantasies, and frustrated desires. *Actual* audiences may have told us that they became richly engaged, that they found the film thrilling, inspiring, liberating, but film theory knows better

Of course there are differences between the *Mail* and film academia These are easy to point to But they should not conceal from us the similarities, both in concepts deployed and, in the end, judgements arrived at And the disturbing silence of film academics in this most important controversy is my strongest justification for issuing this challenge. One of the most important findings, perhaps, of our research into the *Crash* controversy was about the ways in which within the UK there is an unspoken but powerfully operative set of assumptions about the proper functions of film British filmic culture is built around a very narrow image of what films are *allowed* to do, and *Crash* clashed head-on with that image. It is sad to find film academia complicit – and unaware of its complicity – in that narrowness.

9 See for instance Lord Birkett President s introduction *Annual Report* (London BBFC, 1996/7), Alastair Dalton Crashing bore is all talk, no action *The Scotsman* 20 March 1997 Lesley Dick Review of *Crash Sight and Sound* (June 1997), p 34

10 The unwillingness of most film scholars to test or even critically examine the claims implicit in the concept of identification is really striking The most important work on this within film studies is undoubtedly by Jackie Stacey in her *Star Gazing Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London Routledge 1993) – but even she resists abandoning the term despite effectively demolishing its unity and explanatory power Murray Smith has recently tackled the concept from the point of view of cognitive film theory – see his *Engaging Characters Fiction Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford Oxford University Press 1995) – but strangely appears to see no need to submit a series of claims about audiences to the test of actual audiences

The sex lives of cult television characters

SARA GWENLLIAN JONES

Two scenes from slash fiction

> Mulder gasped to see Krycek suddenly in front of him. 'Alex?' he asked in near disbelief.
>
> In answer Krycek braced himself on his arm, leaned over and kissed Mulder full on the mouth The kiss was tender and desperate with loneliness that went soul-deep. When they finally broke apart to gasp for air, they looked into each other's eyes and let the song speak for them [1]

1 Krychick *As Long As You Love Me* URL http //adult dencity com /krychick/ fiction/XF-AsLongAs txt [no date]

> . . the sight of Gabrielle kneeling before her was too close to her nightmarish thoughts Xena pictured herself closing the distance between them She watched, mesmerized, as her left hand reached down, wrapping itself in the young woman's hair as her body lowered itself onto the startled girl Her mouth quickly descended onto Gabrielle's as her left hand firmly held the bard's head in check Xena's free hand began to roam over the bard's body, quickly finding its way under the girl's skirt and straight to its goal.[2]

2 Cousin Liz *And Still She Follows* URL http //cousinliz com/fanfic/ cousinliz_assf html [1992]

The erotic speculations of contemporary slash fiction authors extend in many directions The sexual encounters described in slash stories may be tender, fiercely passionate, casual, masturbatory, voyeuristic, orgiastic, sadomasochistic or non-consensual Almost every imaginable seduction scenario, narrative context, emotional import and sexual practice is somewhere described in slash fiction. Stories may be plotless pornographic tableaux, sexually explicit romances,

comedies, tragedies or action adventures. If slash fiction may be described as a 'genre', then its only convention is that it describes erotic encounters between television characters (or, more rarely, film characters) of the same sex.

Slash fiction takes its name from the punctuating 'slash' in the 'Kirk/Spock' or 'K/S' erotic fan fiction that appeared in the wake of the original *Star Trek* series (1966–9). Slash emerged, Constance Penley suggests, from 'regular' fandom, and seems to have arisen 'spontaneously in various places beginning in the early to mid-seventies'[3] Until the early 1990s, it was published in print fanzines that were sold by mail order and at fan conventions; their circulation was, as this suggests, very small. But by the mid 1990s slash had moved onto the web along with much of the rest of fandom, a shift that increased both its visibility and accessibility As fandom itself has become a mainstream activity online, with hundreds of thousands of participants, so too have the numbers of slash fiction authors and readers greatly increased Tens of thousands of slash stories are archived on dedicated websites, they can be read online, printed out or, increasingly, are archived pre-formatted for downloading to palmtops. As in the early years of slash, the majority of slash writers are heterosexual women[4] However, a significant minority of male fans also write slash, and the male-to-female ratio varies across different fandoms; most *Star Trek* slash is written by women, while *X-Files* (1993–) slash tends to be more mixed Lesbian and bisexual women dominate *Xena Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) slash, but have much less presence in most other slash fandoms.

Scholarly studies of slash (most of which were published in the early 1990s and drew upon research done several years earlier) have tended to emphasize its romantic male/male manifestations[5] Usually authored by heterosexual women, such stories subvert or overturn conventional gender constructs as male bodies and male sexuality are described in terms of profound emotional connection and sensual surrender. Krycek looks into Mulder's eyes and remarks 'their changing sea of green darkened with despair';[6] Kirk 'moans softly' under Spock's caress.[7] Compared with the romance novels whose style such stories emulate, these are unusual formulations. They play with the conventions of romantic love, cast men in the subordinate, yearning roles usually reserved for women, extend the logic of romance into extremes of abjection and domination, move from metaphors of desire to explicit descriptions of its fulfilment. It is no surprise, then, that studies of television fan cultures have often proposed slash fiction as a radical instance of resistant reading, one that counters the marginalization of female characters in much early cult television by appropriating the bodies of men and reworking masculinity and male sexuality. Slash, argues Constance Penley in her study of *Star Trek*-inspired erotic fan writing, is a 'guerrilla erotics'[8] and a 'project of retooling masculinity itself'.[9] Henry Jenkins

3 Constance Penley, *NASA/Trek Popular Science and Sex in America* (London and New York Verso 1997), p 101

4 See ibid pp 100–01

5 See Camille Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia, PA University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York and London Routledge 1992) Penley *NASA/Trek*

6 Kand, *Letter Found On A Coffee Table* URL http://www.ditb.net/basement/library/authork/kand-oneverystr1180-01.htm [no date]

7 Lady Charena, *A Love Supreme* URL http://www.geocities.com/blairsdream/startrek/aluvsupreme.html [No date]

8 Penley *NASA/Trek* p 101

9 Ibid p 127

similarly proposes slash as 'an explicit critique of masculinity' that attempts to 'establish an homosocial-homoerotic continuum as an alternative to repressive and hierarchical male sexuality'.[10]

10 Jenkins *Textual Poachers* p 219

In such formulations, slash is interpreted as 'resistant' or 'subversive' because it seems deliberately to ignore or overrule clear textual messages indicating characters' heterosexuality. Even where characters' sexualities are not indicated in the television text, a wider cultural logic dictates that heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved. Against such uncomplicated assumptions of heterosexuality, slash fiction's constructions of powerful homoerotic attractions seems wholly unfounded, even where homosociality is foregrounded in the source text. Reading 'innocent' same-sex relationships between characters such as Kirk and Spock or Mulder and Krycek as homoerotic appears to directly contradict the explicit evidence and 'preferred meaning' of the text, taking characters in 'unauthorized' directions. But is slash really so distinctive and so oppositional? Do slash stories contradict and resist the texts that inspire them, or do they simply extend certain narrative logics into the realm of sexuality? In online fan fiction archives such as *The Wonderful World of Makebelieve*,[11] conventional male/male slash takes its place alongside other television-inspired erotic literature that spans every gender combination and almost every imaginable sexual practice. Here, male/male erotica represents one set of sexual preferences among many. Slash has innumerable permutations, and stories are often catalogued under headings that further describe their sexual content: group sex, male/male plus male/female, threesomes (two male, one female), female/female, non-consensual male/male, and so on. That such variety of sexual fantasy, both within and outside the slash genre, attaches to cult television characters suggests that there is something about their construction that both invites and tolerates such diversity of use, and which is not adequately accounted for by the 'incorporation/resistance paradigm'[12] that has dominated and conditioned studies of audiences, fans and slash fiction.

11 *The Wonderful World of Makebelieve Archive* URL http //internetdump com/users/dal tonavon/ [No date]

12 Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst *Audiences a Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London Sage 1998) pp 15-36

The incorporation/resistance paradigm rests upon an understanding of the text as an inviolable and discrete semiotic surface, its 'preferred' or 'dominant' textual meanings are accepted, negotiated or opposed by the reader By this rationale, slash fiction, which contradicts the source text's preferred meaning of heterosexuality, must be the product of subversive or 'deviant' reading. But the incorporation/resistance paradigm offers limited and clumsy models that do not account for the deeper textual strategies of cult television, for its engagements with the fantastic, its function as a species of virtual reality, its emphasis upon the implicit, or its invitation to immersive and interactive engagement 'Every act of reading constructs the text and actualizes its world in a different way', writes Marie-Laure Ryan, discussing virtual realities, fictional worlds and

reading processes that resonate powerfully with those of cult television:

> the process of actualization involves such highly individualized operations as filling in the blanks with information drawn from the reader's knowledge, memory and experience; visualizing in imagination the depicted scenes, characters and events; and spatializing the text by following the threads of various thematic webs, often against the directionality of the linear sequence [13]

13 Marie Laure Ryan 'Cyberspace, virtuality and the text' in Ryan (ed.) *Cyberspace Textuality Computer Technology and Literary Theory* (Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press 1999), p. 96

What happens when slash is considered not as 'resistant' but instead as an actualization of latent textual elements? How does slash relate to the textual and metatextual operations of cult television? Is fantastic genre cult television perhaps inherently queer? In order to address these questions this essay will first investigate the narrative logics and fictional worlds of cult television, and its functions as a species of virtual reality.

In the episode 'The Bitter Suite', from the third season of *Xena Warrior Princess* (*XWP*), a traumatized and psychotic Xena beats unconscious her beloved companion Gabrielle and attempts to murder her by hurling her from a cliff into a furious sea. At the last moment, Gabrielle wakes. The two women struggle and plunge together into the churning waters below. It's a dramatic event, certainly, but little suspense attaches to its eventual outcome. Fans know very well that both characters will somehow survive this extreme moment, even if it requires a miraculous return from the dead. They know too that the pair's ruptured relationship will eventually be repaired. And, in broad outline, this is exactly what happens in the episode. Instead of the finality of death, Xena and Gabrielle awake in the magical realm of Illusia where, after much soul-searching, enacted as scenes from a surreal and nightmarish musical, they reconcile and wash up safe and sound, wrapped in each other's arms, on a sandy beach.

Regular viewers of any television series quickly learn to recognize its primary linear narrative patterns and to anticipate their repetition. As Umberto Eco remarks,

> the series works upon a fixed situation and a restricted number of fixed pivotal characters, around whom the secondary and changing ones turn. The secondary characters give the impression that the new story is different from the preceding ones while in fact the narrative scheme does not change [14]

14 Umberto Eco *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press 1994) pp. 85–6

Familiarity with a series produces in viewers a number of general expectations of any given episode (or of story-arcs extended across two or more episodes). *XWP* fans can reasonably assume that in any single episode Xena and Gabrielle will be confronted by a hostile force and will find themselves in one or more hazardous situations

which they will somehow have overcome or escaped by the end of the story. Drawing upon knowledge of the characters that they have acquired from previous episodes, fans can also predict with some accuracy how Xena and Gabrielle are likely to respond in most situations. Above all, fans know that, although some primary plotlines may be left partially unresolved, all must conclude with Xena and Gabrielle surviving to battle on in the next episode.

If the pattern of major narrative events and outcomes in series such as *XWP*, *Star Trek* and *The X-Files* simply recurs, in different guises, in every episode, how do such series attract and maintain large audiences of regular and avid viewers? For Eco, the explanation for a series' popularity resides in this very quality of predictability. The series, he suggests, 'consoles us (the consumers) because it rewards our ability to foresee. we are happy because we discover our own ability to guess what will happen'.[15] But while this maybe true for some series – Eco uses *Columbo* as his example – the fulfilment of audience expectations cannot alone account for the intensity and imaginative range of fans' engagements with cult television series. Furthermore, the predictability that Eco describes accrues only to the linear arrangement of major story events and their trajectory towards closure. It does not account for the metatextual operations of cult series.

15 Ibid p 86

Repetition ensures that the broad syntagmatic movements of cult series are inherently predictable, and this predictability is rendered absolute by the universal fan practice of recording and repeatedly re-viewing episodes Paradoxically, the repetitive structures of cult television series and the repetitive viewing practices of fans facilitate the series' lack of closure. The repetition of the already-known releases fans from the thrall of causality It directs their imaginations towards the text's paradigmatic elements, inviting them to consider what story events reveal about characters, how they contribute to and interconnect with the metatextual backstory, what possibilities are opened up for future storylines, and what other stories haunt the hinterlands of the text In this sense, the already-known of the series' linear narrative formula works like the already-known of historical drama where, as Herbert Lindenberger notes, 'the historical past becomes a kind of closed book, one which is re-enacted as a religious ritual re-enacts a hallowed myth . . Our interest shifts from the *what* to the *how*.'[16]

16 Herbert Lindenberger *Historical Drama the Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago IL University of Chicago Press 1975) p 24

The predictability of the cult series decisively relocates the pleasure of viewing, shifting it away from the anticipation of major story events and towards the always-unfolding and unforecloseable *how* of the metatext. As science fiction author C J. Cherryh says in an essay that dismisses 'the entire concept of plot as significant to literature', story events 'work much more like a fist full of pebbles chucked at a pond. At one toss, one essential Event, concentric rings of action spread out from each impact, unsettling the entire mirror of

What Is '[17] This 'What Is', in cult series, is the vast, elaborate and densely populated fictional world that is constructed episode by episode, extended and embellished by official secondary-level texts (episode guides, novelizations, comics, magazines) and fan-produced tertiary texts (fan fiction, cultural criticism essays, art, scratch videos). Cult television's serial and segmented forms, its familiar formulae, its accumulated multiple storylines, its metatextuality, its ubiquitous intertextuality and intratextuality, its extension across a variety of other media, its modes of self-reflexivity and constant play of interruption and excess, work together to overwhelm the processual order of cause and effect, enigma and resolution, extending story events and other narrative and textual elements across boundless networks of interconnected possibilities Tellingly, these characteristic devices and operations of cult television are echoed by the few films – *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *The Crow* (Alex Proyas, 1994) – that have evolved and maintained substantial comparable fan cultures. Like cult television, such films both construct explicitly fantastic alternate realities and mimic the metatextual and accumulative effects of seriality through sequelization and through secondary-level texts that are released, as Will Brooker notes, not as 'a single wave of spin-offs' but rather as 'a constant ripple' of supplementary materials.[18] Fans purchase posters, stills and models that function as prompts to the imagination, overlaying material reality with the signs of the fictional world; they draw upon official secondary texts and fan-produced tertiary texts in order to further extend and embellish it. The appeal of these vast, transmedia fictions lies precisely in their invitations to immersion and interactivity; they are constructed, marketed, and used by fans not as 'texts' to be 'read' but as cosmologies to be entered, experienced and imaginatively interacted with. Seriality, transmediality and explicitly fantastic diegetic worlds combine to effect a perceptual transparency that leads fans' imaginations through the surface of the text and into the metatextual depth beyond, affording entry into a coherent but insubstantial virtual reality

Crucially, the fictional worlds of cult television series are quite unlike the ordinary world of material reality As John Thornton Caldwell points out

> *Beauty and the Beast*, *The X-Files*, *Quantum Leap*, *Star Trek* and *Max Headroom* all initiated fan activity not simply because they were visual, but because they also utilised self-contained and volatile narrative worlds, imaginary constructs more typical of science fiction [19]

Cult television worlds are exotic and exciting. While a minority of series achieve cult status without explicitly engaging with the fantastic (*The Professionals*, *Starsky and Hutch*), their worlds are

17 C J Cherryh *The Myth of Plot a Heresy* URL http://www.simegen.com/school/workshop/cjcherryh/cjcherryh.html [1993]

18 Will Brooker, 'Internet fandom and the continuing narratives of *Star Wars* *Blade Runner* and *Alien*' in Annette Kuhn (ed.) *Alien Zone II the Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema* (London Verso 2000) p 51

19 John Thornton Caldwell *Televisuality Style Crisis and Authority in American TV* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1995) p 261

nevertheless far removed from the everyday: packed with adventures, colourful characters, unfeasible escapades, and miraculously invulnerable heroes. And they *are* exceptions: the overwhelming majority of those series that evolve substantial creative fan cultures belong to the fantastic genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Their fictional geographies are alien, haunted or mythologized landscapes visually inscribed as strange and mysterious, they are full of night and strange beings (*The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Beauty and the Beast*); they have a wild and verdant beauty (*XWP*, *Hercules*); they are home to alien civilizations (*Star Trek*, *Farscape*, *Babylon 5*).

The fictional worlds of cult television are governed by fantastic logics that mark their distance from the everyday. Gods, ghosts and monsters are tangible presences in these realms; intergalactic travel is possible; cyborg entities exist; death is not necessarily final; the universe is teeming with intelligent life. Unconstrained by the pragmatics of realism, storylines are often speculative and focused philosophical explorations of the outer reaches of the imagination, proposing alternate selves, parallel universes, and metaphysical paradoxes. They accommodate those wondering, almost whimsical questions that most of us ask ourselves from time to time: who might 'I' be if I wasn't me? What would it be like to be telepathic? What might an alien look like, and what would it think of us? How would the present be different if a time-traveller altered something in the past? The aesthetic, intellectual and imaginative appeal of fantastic genres is precisely that they are fantastic. Relieved of any obligation to verisimilitude, they afford exploration of the purely speculative.

Lubomír Dolezel remarks that it would take 'a text of infinite length to construct a complete fictional world'.[20] Fictional worlds are inherently incomplete, and the metaverses of cult television series always extend far beyond what is visible on screen at any given moment or in any given episode. Detached from objective reality, the visible spaces, actions and events of the televisual text have invisible lateral resonance; they function metonymically, referring us to spaces, actions and events beyond themselves, elsewhere in an implied and hallucinatory realm of structured but unforecloseable possibilities. For fans, major characters function as points of entry into the metaverse, as objects of fascination in their own right, and as avatars, ethereal beings that are animated and psychically inhabited by fans' projected imaginations. Such characters are wholly exotic. Often, they possess special powers or abilities – the magical technologies of science fiction series, the superhuman fighting skills of Xena or Buffy. Usually, they are conflicted in some way. Xena struggles against her psychotically violent urges, Seven of Nine strives to reconcile her Borg and human identities, Mulder obsesses about his sister, Buffy seeks a balance between her destiny as the

20 Lubomir Dolezel *Heterocosmica Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) p. 169

Slayer and her desire to be an ordinary teenager. Their lives are unfeasibly eventful, every week they are seized by adventure. They are usually mobile, wanderers across fantastic terrains. The appeal of such characters, with their complex psychologies and unconstrained lifestyles, is easy to understand They are not burdened by the responsibilities and anxieties that plague us; their travels are not charter-flights bracketed by departure lounges; they do not worry about providing for their old age, they are not constrained by the routines of work They have our adventures for us.

Like the worlds they inhabit, cult television characters are incomplete and incompletable. Lacking referents, they exist as liminal entities poised between tele-presence and absence. Every diegetic elaboration adds intricacy and uncertainty to their hauntological shadow-selves beyond the screen; the more we learn about them, the more latent they become. As Marie-Laure Ryan observes:

> in a world presenting some hidden depth (let us call it a 'realistic world') there is something behind the narrated: the characters have minds, intents, desires, and emotions, and the reader is encouraged to reconstruct the contents of their mind – either for its own sake, or in order to evaluate their behaviour [21]

21 Marie Laure Ryan Immersion vs interactivity virtual reality and literary theory *Postmodern Culture*, vol 5, no 1 (1994) URL http //www humanities uci edu/mposter/syllabi/readings/ ryan html

Creative and interpretive fan practices are all concerned with this latency, with reading through the surface semiotics of the diegesis and beyond into the implied interior and exterior realities of the characters and their world. Again, the linear trajectory of the narrative is subordinated in favour of depth What is of primary importance to fans is not how characters move along the narrative but rather what narrative events can reveal about characters. As Henry Jenkins observes, for fans 'the best episodes are those which not only conform to fans' expectations about characters but also contribute new insights into their personalities and motivations'.[22] In an essay for the fan-produced *XWP* e-journal *Whoosh!*, fan critic Merry Gilmore notes the frequency with which fan fiction authors depict scenes in which Gabrielle cares for an incapacitated Xena and use this stock situation to make explicit their diegetically implied lesbian relationship

22 Jenkins *Textual Poachers* p 98

> All the while we can hear her thoughts· Gabrielle worships Xena Gabrielle feels pain for Xena Gabrielle would live for Xena. Gabrielle would die for Xena Gabrielle loves Xena. And Xena weakens. The mask cracks. She says what we all know. O.K No surprises here. We know all the above from the few quiet moments the two share each episode. Those quiet fleeting moments [23]

23 Merry Gilmore, A fan s first introduction to fan fiction *Whoosh! The Journal of the International Association of Xena Studies* issue 6 (March 1997) URL http //www whoosh org/ issue6/gilmore html

Of course, fans don't really 'know' the interior workings of characters' minds and hearts in any absolute sense because those

minds and hearts have no actuality; the television series furnishes only surface indications of these ultimately ungraspable depths. It offers clues, some subtle and some explicit, to interiorities that have no objective existence, no facility for final confirmation or denial. Crucially, the series also provides silences – 'those quiet fleeting moments' – that remark only the absent presence of the latent, and it provides the spectral depths that tolerate such speculations As another *XWP* fan critic writes,

> Xena's soul has been revealed in fragments. Each fragment is a piece of an extraordinary puzzle which one would think would explain her actions were one able to see the image in its totality [24]

But this 'totality' is always absent, and it is this absence that seduces the imagination. The ethereal substance of cult television's fictional worlds and fictional characters both invites and refuses completion; there always remains the 'impossibility of verifying properties of the fictional entity not attributed to it by the fictional text itself'.[25] Cult television characters have structure; they are not blank ciphers. But they are ultimately unknowable others whose exotic appeal depends, in large part, on their immunity to the forces that structure ordinary reality.

Heterosexuality is as much a matter of social practice as it is of sexual practice As social practice, it assumes a narrative form of its own, with plot points of courtship, marriage, domesticity, reproduction, child-rearing, provision for the family Heterosexuality's narrative form is, arguably, the most embedded and pervasive foundational structure of ordinary reality. Intrinsic to it are powerful moral and social imperatives that urge economic responsibility, domestic stability, the avoidance of risk, and the shrinking of horizons to the productive space of work and the reproductive space of home As social practice, heterosexuality is antithetical to the exoticism and adventure that characterize the fictional worlds of cult television series If heterosexual relations between major characters go beyond the preliminary of courtship, this exterior narrative of social practice is invoked and both the cult fiction and its fans are unceremoniously returned to the structures, realities and stresses of everyday life. Fan critic Fiona Hough remarks the corrosive effects of the collapse into ordinariness that followed the marriage of the protagonists in *Lois and Clark The New Adventures of Superman* (1993–7):

> instead of broadening the scope of stories available, it spelled the beginning of the end of a once interesting program. We then saw such interesting storylines as:
> a) Lois and Clark buying a house;

24 Maytee Aspuro The fourth season spiritual journeys *Whoosh! The Journal of the International Association of Xena Studies*, issue 41 (Spring 2000) URL http //whoosh org/issue41/aspuro1 html

25 Ruth Ronen *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1994) p 114

b) Lois and Clark arguing over who was the best cook, and,
c) Lois losing her memory and forgetting that she was married/in love with Clark

. . even bringing back Lex Luthor could not save the show once the producers started down the slippery path of giving in to temptation.[26]

Cult television's imperatives are fantasy, adventure and the sustained virtuality of an exotic fictional world – imperatives that make heterosexuality problematic because the narrativized social process it invokes threatens the cult fiction's anti-realism. Cult series therefore tend to truncate or problematize heterosexual relationships involving A and B characters (though C and D characters are usually free to marry, if they so wish). Thus, Mulder can enjoy his collection of pornographic videos but he cannot enjoy Scully, Kirk can chase doomed earthwomen and unsuitable aliens, but he cannot proceed beyond seduction and/or romance to become a husband and father; Buffy and Angel's love must remain unconsummated because if Angel experiences 'a moment of true happiness' his soul will be lost forever. *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–90), the only fantastic genre cult television series to which a realized heterosexual romance is central and constant, is able to engage with heterosexuality only so long as its romantically-involved protagonists belong to opposed worlds – a situation that prevents their relationship from developing beyond romance. When Catherine eventually becomes pregnant with Vincent's child, she dies immediately after the birth, thus precluding any happy Kodak moments. In contrast, Xena can share her life and, the series strongly suggests, a lesbian relationship with Gabrielle and still remain a nomadic warrior, forever moving from adventure to adventure. Her male lovers in the series must die young or quickly depart some other way, while her relationship with Gabrielle endures because it does not trigger the same trajectory towards domestic stasis.

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Alexander Doty notes a similar problematizing of heterosexuality in horror films and melodramas. The conventions of these genres, he suggests,

> actually encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry. In a sense, then, *everyone's* pleasure in these genres is 'perverse', is queer, as much of it takes place within the space of the contra-heterosexual and the contra-straight.[27]

The failures of heterosexual romances in cult television series similarly position the audience to find queer pleasures in cult genres and texts. Because active heterosexuality must continually be reined in if it is not to effect a collapse of the exotic–fantastic into

26 Fiona Hough 'Why subtext should never become maintext in *Xena Warrior Princess Whoosh!* The Journal of the International Association of Xena Studies issue 27 (December 1998) URL http://www.whoosh.org/issue27/hough1.html

27 Alexander Doty *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p. 15

suburban domesticity, protagonists' primary relationships usually fall into one of two categories:

1. Primary relationships between a male and a female character, which signal a mutual sexual attraction that is never fully realized (Mulder and Scully, Picard and Crusher, Aeryn Sun and Crichton) or which cannot progress beyond romance (Buffy and Angel, Catherine and Vincent)
2. Primary relationships between characters of the same sex (Kirk and Spock, Hercules and Iolus, Xena and Gabrielle)

Successful primary relationships in cult television series, then, are either thwarted heterosexual relationships or same-sex pairings. Fans encounter a tension sexually interesting characters whose entanglement in heterosexual relationships threatens to invoke not just heterosexuality's passions but also its trajectory – a trajectory that leads straight back to a material and mundane world, the erasure of which is the very thing that makes the cult series compelling The limitations imposed by the fantastic imperative upon heterosexuality create a void that allows an implied homoeroticism to function as an alternative, and less damaging, possibility of the cult fiction's exotic substance From this perspective, the exotic erotics of slash fiction look much less like instances of 'resistance' and much more like extensions of cult television's own contra-straight logics. Slash arises out of cult television's intrinsic requirement of distance from everyday reality, its related erasure of heterosexuality's social process, and its provision of perceptual depths that invite and tolerate diverse speculation about characters' 'hidden' thoughts and feelings

Of course, not all cult television fans fantasize, write or read slash Much fan fiction is concerned with fully realizing heterosexual relationships between protagonists that cannot be realized in the series themselves. Some slash and romantic non-slash fiction develops same-sex relationships in the direction of domesticity In the *XWP* romances of the popular and highly regarded fan writer Melissa Good,[28] Xena and Gabrielle's relationship mirrors heterosexual marriage as the characters set up home together and raise a family. In many respects, such constructions are more deserving of the term 'resistant' than is slash, since slash tends to construct erotic interludes that do not substantially alter the fantastical constructions and lifestyles of characters

That slash fiction continues to be theorized as 'resistant' and – though it is rarely explicitly described as such – as 'deviant' is testament both to a notion of text/reader engagements as interpretive rather than interactive and to a continued refusal to acknowledge where and how queerness manifests itself. Like the queer readings of films discussed by Doty, slash fiction has been valorized as a rebellion *against* the text, a scavenging for textual crumbs that become the raw material for an alchemical creative reworking. But

28 Melissa Good s XWP fan fiction is archived at *The Bards Corner* URL http //www ausxip com/ fanfic html

cult television series are already 'queer' in their constructions of fantastic virtual realities that must problematize heterosexuality and erase heterosexual process in order to maintain their integrity and distance from the everyday. It is the cult television series itself which implicitly 'resists' the conventions of heterosexuality; the slash fiction stories written by some of its fans render explicit this implicit function and, more importantly, are a reflection of cult television's immersive and interactive logics.

Boyz Do Cry: screening history's white lies

JENNIFER DEVERE BRODY

For Western Modernity – which one can date from the peculiar coincidence of Enlightenment thought and the ambitious pursuit of trade in and enslavement of Africans and African Americans – the scopic is the preeminent cultural matrix of power [1]

In the special *Screen* debate on the film *Boys Don't Cry*, Michele Aaron's essay 'Pass/fail'[2] focuses on how the film hails spectators to view its queer, open-ended narrative, and Julianne Pidduck's reading[3] looks at the 'distortions of allegiances' in such interpellations. This essay investigates that which spectators cannot possibly interpret: the unseen black man at the original event upon which the film is based, Phillip DeVine. This paper, like Pidduck's, reads extra-diegetically in order to question the aesthetic pleasures offered by this fictive version of a factual case. Whereas Pidduck suggests that aesthetics cannot wholly replace ethics, I shall argue that they are inseparable. For me, the inextricability of ethics and aesthetics is demonstrated in the way in which the production of a pure white queer subjectivity in this film is achieved through the excision of black humanity. In this reading of Kimberly Peirce's first feature, *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), I am interested in thinking about the 'negative' space of the film; indeed, about material so absent it never even appeared on the cutting-room floor. My evidence for this argument comes from reading the documents of Brandon Teena/Teena Brandon's life-story, studying the rhetoric used in interviews with the director, and finally, looking broadly at the white lies screened in film history.

Reporter Aphrodite Jones's written account of the Brandon Teena

1 Lindon Barrett *Seeing Double Blackness and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 218.

2 Michele Aaaron 'Pass/fail' *Screen* vol. 42 no. 1 (2001) pp. 92–6.

3 Julianne Pidduck 'Risk and queer spectatorship' *Screen* vol. 42 no. 2 (2001) pp. 97–102.

tale, *All That She Wanted*, was the first packaged version of Brandon's story for popular consumption.[4] The epigraph Jones selected for the project is: 'We fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4:17). This Biblical reference recalls James Baldwin's riff in his book about the Atlanta child murders, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, which suggests that, 'What we do not remember holds the key to who we are'.[5] It was Jones's account that introduced me not only to Brandon Teena, her killers, and her bevy of girlfriends, but also to an apparent interloper: a young black man named Phillip DeVine.

Boys Don't Cry is emblematic of the way in which the radical erasure of blackness makes queer stories queerer. This erasure is all the more problematic because it suggests that visual media in particular follow the trajectory of western modernity that is itself a screen which seeks too often either to efface or exploit difference Visuality has increasingly become the way in which we know the history of the world (we need only think of the televising of the destruction of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001) Focusing on how history is screened in conjunction with history's screenings suggests that such historical translations themselves hide from view other aspects of historical narratives. This paper focuses on this disjunction between memory and history by posing the following question what is it about the historical erasure of blackness that appears to make some queer texts queerer? In short, I examine how the white forms of queerness are achieved in the film *Boys Don't Cry*.

The reportage about Teena Brandon/Brandon Teena presents a case of rural violence and early death, and a powerful example of the struggle with normativity The less acclaimed documentary by Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir, *The Brandon Teena Story* (1998), is in my view both more ethical and perhaps even more experimental in its telling than is its successor, *Boys Don't Cry*. Contrary to the critic who referred to the film's 'macabre sensationalism and dutiful prosaics',[6] I found the documentary suprisingly compelling, at least in its initial moments Indeed, *Boys Don't Cry* echoes many aspects of the documentary the establishing shots of Falls City, the use of superfast photography, and the predominantly country music soundtrack. However, the major difference (besides the *de rigueur* use of talking heads) is the documentary's inclusion of DeVine. It begins with the sound of three shots fired. Then, three snapshots follow – of Brandon, Lisa and Phillip respectively

The trilogy of sound and images is repeated throughout the film, almost as a *leitmotif*. Unlike *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Brandon Teena Story* documentary begins and ends with the memory of all three victims There is an attempt to fill in the gaps in DeVine's story Similarly, the book based on Brandon includes several pictures of

4 Aphrodite Jones *All She Wanted* (New York Pocket Books 1996)

5 James Baldwin *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York Henry Holt, 1987) One might compare the differences in these cases in useful ways For example numerous black children, mostly young boys were murdered in the case and a gay black male was accused of and tried for the crime

6 Danny Leigh Boy wonder *Sight and Sound* (March 2000) p 18

DeVine, not to mention a chapter devoted to his life story. But in *Boys Don't Cry* there are only two victims, not three. In this respect, the documentary attends to the role of race as well as class, gender and sexuality It mentions that there were a few black families in town but no gays This reading of 'minority' positions is reversed in *Boys Don't Cry*, where there is the mention of gays but no blacks or other people of colour

Boys Don't Cry reminds us of the violence of removal (and I use this word explicitly because it refers to the Plains Indians of Nebraska mentioned in both the book and the documentary but not the film) As James Snead has argued 'Omission and exclusion are perhaps the most widespread tactics of racial stereotyping but also the most difficult to prove because their manifestation is precisely absence itself'.[7] Moreover, he suggests that 'since framing, editing, and cutting out are indeed the exigencies of filmic and aesthetic practice, it was possible to hide the ideologically motivated distortions under the mask of artistic economy or exigency'.[8]

Although Snead cites these practices in relation to films of the 1930s and 1940s, his argument applies equally well to the processes of exclusion in *Boys Don't Cry*: the total excision of the black body of Phillip DeVine The troubling presence (what is a straight black boy doing in a queer story anyway?) of the disabled DeVine (his mother took the drug DES which left him required him to wear a prosthesis) is relegated to a predetermined absence what Sharon Holland and Michael Taussig name 'the space of the dead'.[9]

Here I agree with Pidduck's conclusion that we must be wary of revelling too much in the pleasures of a text for which 'the notion of life and death as "haunting" the frame of entertainment' instead insists upon a limit to our pleasure [10] Thus, I place *Boys Don't Cry* in the emerging tradition identified by Amy Villerejo and others as 'the new queer cinema'.[11] This new genre/movement proffers a 'post-Stonewall repertoire of images which are mainly white highly commodifiable to mainstream audiences and anchored in rights-based discourses of political activism'.[12] The overbearing whiteness of this cinema, of which *Boys Don't Cry* is a prime example, relies upon the erasure of blackness. Nothing is included in the film to mark DeVine's death. He is not represented in the printed white letters on an otherwise blank black screen at the end of the film which commemorate the others' lives. DeVine's story is absented from the film: his life and his devastating and tragic death does not merit attention Where Peirce had an opportunity, if not an obligation, to record the real confluence of racism, classism, misogyny, transgender discrimination and homophobia, she chose instead to ignore the racist issues at stake in this story.

In her reading of the film, Pidduck includes a snippet of dialogue between Brandon and Lana The two discuss Brandon's decision to participate in the violent 'redneck' ritual that results in his being

7 James Snead *White Screens/Black Images Hollywood from the Dark Side* (New York Routledge 1994) p 16

8 Ibid p 7

9 Sharon Holland, *Raising the Dead Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity in American Culture* (Durham NC Duke University Press 2000) p 4

10 Pidduck 'Risk and queer spectatorship p 102

11 Amy Villerejo Forbidden love pulp as lesbian history in Ellis Hanson (ed), *Out Takes Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham NC Duke University Press 1999), p 331

12 Cynthia Amsden On screen preview *Boys Don t Cry* opens Feb 18 at the Princess II *SEE Magazine* (online version) 2000

'tied to the back of a truck and [being] dragged like a dog'. This conversation screens a reference to an event, utterly current at the time of the film, in which a black man, James Byrd, was dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas, in what many consider to be a lynching. In this sense, Peirce participates, however unwittingly, in a larger pattern of leaving race out of the picture so that other identity categories appear stable and queerness is represented in an way that makes it synonymous with whiteness.

In the film's journey to becoming a classic 'boy' meets girl, 'Romeo and Juliet' story (the latter reference comes directly from director Peirce herself), it actively forgets other complicating, seemingly extraneous material. In interviews, Peirce cites dramas such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as the film *Titanic*, as sources for her production More specifically, she credits Aristotle's ideas about 'organic unity [which] throws out anything that's not necessary because if it's not necessary you're detracting from the whole' as a major influence on her aesthetic practice [13] When asked about the facts of the case, she explained that she had jettisoned a thesis about Pauline Cushman, an African-American woman who passed as a white man during the Civil War, in favour of making a film about Teena Brandon. Referring to the decisions involved in making the film, Peirce explains that:

> the story is completely fact-based (streamlined slightly for the sake of telling but not altered or Disneyfied) I never really look at the them as 'the facts' of the case, because for most people, there were very few facts and for me there were five-and-a-half years of facts. If you think about what the facts were for me, they were the whole interview [of Brandon] with the sheriff to talk about John Lotter, they were Lotter's entire life, they were Brandon's entire life, they were Lana's entire life. When you say stray from the facts, here's the move [Peirce draws a diagram of a small square on a piece of notebook paper] and then here's what happened [Peirce draws an enormous rectangle around the small square] So it's interesting when people say, 'What did you change?' Well, you can't look at it that way. Here I was, trying to find the underlying emotional truth and from that, [points to the rectangle] I told one story that attracted me, the tragic events which were motivated by his passing as a boy Then, what I had to do was yank-yank-yank-yank. Basically, I had to focus on what I call privileged events [14]

In this lengthy interview, Peirce takes pains to explain her labour in reviving Brandon's story so that, 'Suddenly, it's alive'. Peirce's account of the process, her adherence to classical aesthetics, makes her choice to leave DeVine out of the story at first seem benign – his death just detracted from the main thrust of the story, it was, literally in Peirce's graphic rendering on paper, extraneous.

13 Kimberly Peirce quoted in Gretchen Lee Passing attraction *Curve* vol 10 no 1 (2000) p 16

14 Ibid

unnecessary, eccentric. On a second reading, Peirce's rhetoric, in word, gesture and deed, makes it seem as if at least two black bodies had to die in order for Teena Brandon/Brandon Teena to live in art.

The narrative Peirce relays parallels a larger narrative about the origins of queer history. As Scott Bravermann discusses in his book, *Queer Fictions of the Past History, Culture and Difference*, the quintessential origin story of queer figures roots the queer past in Ancient Greece. In his chapter 'It's Greek to whom?', he 'seeks to problematize the racialized history of white queers that positions them differently from black gays and lesbians' [15] Bravermann's reading of this invented tradition of a classical past gives us a critical genealogy that we can use to rethink the genesis of Peirce's film This account of the film's 'birth' contrasts with court documents about the deaths, which it names as executions, bringing up the issue of *res gestae*. '*Res Gestae* means that even if the object of the felony is technically over, if the later events occur in such close proximity to the original felony, then it's all part of one transaction.'[16] As the court transcript records: 'Even if we've got felony murder of Teena Brandon, what about Lisa Lambert and Phillip DeVine? These are executions. They are assassinations. And they tell a lot about the intent of the people when they walked in the door These aren't just wild shots that happened to hit someone these are calculated executions. . Consider Phillip DeVine If you can, imagine the terror of Phillip DeVine sitting in that room, this young amputee, sitting in the other room listening to two people die and knowing – he had to know he was . . . he was next '[17] What the court transcript reminds us of here is the alignment between crimes of race, class, sexuality and gender

Given the time Peirce spent attending the trial and visiting the crime scene, her decision not to include DeVine in *Boys* is disturbing. She explains the import of travelling to Falls City with gender activist and writer Kate Bornstein as follows.

> To me it was important to see the blood on the floor, the holes in the wall, to be sitting there at the epicentre of the pain. . As a director, it was important for me to sit there and to see 'How long did it take to get from the road to the farmhouse? What does it feel like to go over those wooden steps?' . Then you can ask yourself all those dramatic questions: 'Well, who was shot first?' 'Why didn't Brandon go out the window?' and 'What's this place like in the dark?'[18]

Obviously from this well-documented testimony, Peirce was not ignorant of DeVine's presence at the scene of the crime So why did she chose to reposition him from his marginal place in the other room to the space of the dead? Perhaps one can only speculate about the motivations behind this decision. But the effects are familiar ones in the history of racist representations the erasure of DeVine from

15 Scott Bravermann *Fictions of the Queer Past History, Culture and Difference* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1997) p 48

16 Amsden 'On screen preview

17 From the closing statement of the trial URL http //www foxsearchlight com/boysdon tcry/trial2/html

18 Ibid

the narrative places the white female bodies as the only true victims of crime; and the film's inability to show DeVine as violated rather than violator perpetuates the myth of the black man as always already a perpetrator of crime. Perhaps it was seen as impossible to read an image of a straight middle-class black male with a white girlfriend as an image of 'innocent' tragedy, particularly in the outlaw story that is Brandon's

The Global Transgendering Site compiled by Susan Stryker has a link called 'Remembering Our Dead' which begins with George Santayana's line 'Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it'.[19] In translating a version of the past into a cinematic narrative, it is as important to analyze how we forget as it is to discuss what we remember. Peirce's film concludes with a white light, fading to a white screen, a slow pan over a dead body and the voiceover of Brandon reading his last love letter to Lana as she drives away down the highway. The choice to idealize and romanticize the main 'couple' in the film is a traditional move. Instead of showing the connections between and among race, class, gender and sexuality by stressing actual alliances with othered others, Peirce chooses to play to target audiences' assumed prejudices and market patterns of identification by making otherwise odious characters palatable through proximity to the normative. Ironically, perhaps, the rebellious gender outlaw Brandon is romanticized in contrast to the middle-class, normative (except for race and able-bodiedness) college student, Phillip.

If nations are tied to hagiography, what can we say about a queer nation whose mediated martyrs are overwhelmingly white (think of Rock Hudson, Matthew Shepard, Brandon Teena)? What of Arthur Warren Junior and the numerous faceless, nameless others who also have died violent deaths but without ceremony? In whose national sociopolitical historical memory will these forgotten dead be housed? Are we indeed living out a fantasy in which our 'historical memory of slavery tends toward amnesia'?[20] As Judith Halberstam notes, 'Radical interventions come from careful consideration of racial and class constructions of sexual identities . . . from consideration of the politics of mobility outlined by the potent prefix "trans" . . . Butches and FTM's alike need to think carefully about the kinds of men or masculine beings that we become and lay claim to . . . Alternative masculinities ultimately will fail to change existing gender hierarchies to the extent to which they fail to be feminist, anti-racist and queer.'[21] *Boys Don't Cry* made Hollywood history but it failed to produce an ethical history, owing much of its success to a film history in which white lies have continued to illuminate black screens.

19 *Remembering Our Dead* URL http://www.glbhistory.org/html

20 Eric Foner 'How the desire for profit led to the invention of race' *London Review of Books* 4 February 1999 p. 4

21 Judith Halberstam *Female Masculinity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press 1998) p. 173

review:

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, 201pp.

Jerome Silbergeld, *China into Film: Frames of Reference in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Envisioning Asia Series). London: Reaktion Books, 1999, 352pp.

DAVID DESSER

Confronted with two books for review on the ostensible same 'subject' – Chinese Cinema – there is much temptation to compare the two, setting off one from the other by way of similarity and difference. On the one hand, the two books could not be more different. Neither author, for instance, references the other in comparably extensive bibliographies; one approaches the subject by way of political philosophy and postmodern theory, the other by way of art history and its traditions, one is at pains to draw attention to herself as Other, as not-Chinese, the other mentions nothing of himself except as 'art historian', thus 'Other-ing' himself from the field of Cinema Studies, but not the subject, one is a British woman working in Australia and published by an American scholarly press, the other is (presumably) an American man, working in America, published by a British scholarly press Of course, one could go on in this vein, but the point is that there is no necessary connection between these two works. And yet . . we see both authors generously acknowledging the work that has come before theirs, each paying tribute to Chris Berry, Nick Browne, Rey Chow, Paul Clark, Tony Rayns and Esther Yau. *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1985) is a central film for both books, and both books similarly find *Sacrificed*

Youth (Zhang Nuanxin, 1985; called *Sacrifice of Youth* by Donald) an interesting text for analysis, making a similar point with similar references. Finally, both draw on literary works where appropriate (as the source material for films, most obviously) and compare films to fine art works – the latter the major contribution of Silbergeld's book, of course, but one nicely utilized by Donald, albeit far more sparingly.

Donald's book is both more ambitious and thus, perhaps inevitably, less satisfying. This is to take nothing away from Silbergeld, who impresses with his range of references and far-reaching knowledge (though I get the feeling his major introduction to film theory was the undergraduate favourite Mast-Cohen-Braudy anthology, *Film Theory and Criticism*).[1] Donald wants to think through the notion of a Chinese national cinema or even a transnational one by recourse to the idea of the 'publicness' of cinema Cinema, for Donald, creates a symbolic public space and, thus, the idea of a political imaginary. This imaginary is something like the Lacanian Imaginary, except it is collective (albeit open to an individual), and the cinema is representative of Lacan's Symbolic. Simultaneously, Habermas's notion of the 'public sphere' is also very much in evidence, though far less so is Miriam Hansen's adaptation of Habermas to the cinema in her hugely influential essays reproduced in *Babel and Babylon*.[2] Occasionally, the project of highlighting and analyzing a Chinese public space seems to me to get lost in a more traditional (albeit probing) use of feminist theory Moreover, there is, in such a brief work, far too much preliminary or introductory material, both to the book as a whole and at the head of many of the chapters. But the occasional brilliant blast of insight rewards the sometime-loss of focus or the frequent over-emphasis on explaining the background theory at the expense of the subject of Chinese cinema.

The book is rather brief, hugely suggestive, but ultimately unconvincing The brevity of the chapters mirrors the brevity of the book as a whole, each chapter approximately twenty pages. This works all right for the fine chapter (four) dealing mostly with *Yellow Earth*, but less well for the chapter (two) on *The White-Haired Girl* (Shui Hua, Wang Bin, 1950) and *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946). Here, for instance, we are presented with a twenty-page chapter, thirteen pages of which are devoted to introductory material and only five pages to the two films which are the alleged focus of the chapter, and only one of those pages devoted to *Black Narcissus*. This hardly enables the crosscultural analysis promised by the opening sections of the chapter.

There is a patched-together feel to the book as a whole, too. Chapters five and six appeared elsewhere (chapter five in the pages of this very journal) while chapter two seems particularly disjointed in itself, as if the introductory material belonged elsewhere than as

1 Gerald Mast Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy (eds) *Film Theory and Criticism Introductory Readings* (fourth edition) (New York and Oxford Oxford University Press 1992)

2 Miriam Hansen *Babel and Babylon Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press 1991)

preface to the discussion of the two films under review. More to the point, I believe that the focus on gender ultimately prevails at the expense of the focus on public space These are not mutually exclusive areas, to be sure, and there is the sense that the author believes that the creation of public space comes at the expense of the woman, of the female body as a sexualized, gendered being This is a provocative point, but, as it happens, one that has been frequently made *vis-à-vis* Chinese cinema and its construction of the nation, albeit not in these exact terms. The focus on gender is irrefutable as most of the films under extensive analysis revolve around gender issues and the subjugation of the female, whether to male or to Party demands. *Yellow Earth*, *Sacrifice of Youth* and *Ermo* (Zhou Xiaowen, 1994), for instance, are obviously female-centred films, while the author makes the fine point that as regards *Beijing Bastards* (Yang Zhong, 1993) and *The Days* (Wang Xiaoshuai, 1993), 'The neglect of female subjectivity – or rather, female psychic coherence – is particularly noticeable when the female *body* is so important to the plots' (p. 113, emphasis in original) Fine and probing insights such as, in regards to *The White-Haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment of Women* (Xie Jin, 1960), 'the female revolutionary is always sutured into a discourse of male supremacy, which is fixed by the power of the patriarchal enemy, and the agency of the Party representative"' owe nothing, it seems to me, to the discourse of cultural public space. However, I am struck by the notion of the socialist-realist gaze, an adaptation, obviously, of the psychoanalytic gaze of film theory, but which is modified to create the notion of the collectivization of the gaze. Here, in the gaze of a (male) character looking off into an unseen space (no point-of-view structure to suture the look back onto the spectator) is the gaze of the totalitarian leader which freezes the narrative in a binding together of past, present and future. 'The gaze off screen is a fixed stare out to the horizon, beyond the diegetic world, and apparently also beyond the world of the audience The gaze is quintessentially anti-individual It belongs to great leaders, and to representatives of collective action' (p. 62). The use of this gaze on the part of the male hero in *Yellow Earth* brings an irony to the film that the Chinese audience, in particular, can appreciate. Thus Donald demonstrates quite brilliantly that the politicization of cinema, the sense of a cultural or symbolic public space, rests very firmly on the audience to whom the film is directed To western audiences, the failure of the Communist cadre and the film's critique of the Party, is perhaps less clear than it might be to a Chinese audience more attuned to the specifics of the narrative ruptures and to the existence of a public imaginary which can be subverted. It is here, in moments like this, where the shift in focus from a national cinema to a public imaginary created through cinema, really pays off.

Donald's book ranges widely across film history, world and

Chinese cinema both, but, inevitably it seems, the greatest attention is given to Fifth Generation works, including also *The Blue Kite* (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1992) and *In The Wild Mountains* (Yan Xueru, 1986), in addition to *Yellow Earth* and others mentioned. The author might wish to note that D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was originally released in 1915, not 1919 (p. 24), and that figure 3 1 on p. 42 is misidentified. A little more clarity as to why some films were chosen and not others would have been desirable, but I think that also reflects the somewhat patched-together quality of the book. Nevertheless, no scholar of Chinese cinema can afford to ignore this book, but the more casual reader I think will find it less inviting

Jerome Silbergeld offers both scholars and more casual readers a bit more of an invitation. He offers his book as a contribution to Chinese film studies via the discipline of Art History He is insistent on defining what an art-historical approach means and to justify his selection of films. An art-historical approach by definition necessitates a strong emphasis on image as compared to text, a way of looking steeped in appreciation for and knowledge of traditional imagery and a concern for the relation of images to relevant texts and contexts (p 8) This art-historical approach allows Silbergeld to escape what for many has been a central conundrum of Chinese cinema studies, the notion of a 'Chinese' art produced by a foreign medium, that is, the Chineseness of (western) cinema. Silbergeld notes, 'While comparison with Western film is valuable, comparisons with historical examples of Chinese visuality, as seen in traditional Chinese painting, is invaluable' (p. 11). To that end, the author juxtaposes numerous examples of classical or traditional Chinese paintings with film frame enlargements. (He insists in a footnote that to use publicity stills and not frame enlargements is academically unacceptable, even absurd) And he insists that his choice of films is quite definitely drawn from what might seem already to be a canon of Chinese films, those films routinely available in the West (on film and videotape – though he is much less insistent on not using video as he in on using frame enlargements) He insists, for instance, that these films (*Yellow Earth*, *Red Sorghum* [Zhang Yimou, 1987], *Horse Thief* [Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1986], *Farewell My Concubine* [Chen Kaige, 1993], *King of Children* [Chen Kaige, 1987], *Judou* [Zhang Yimou, 1990], and so on) are in fact among the finest, most enriching and challenging produced by the Chinese film industry, and that, in any case, there is little point discussing films that one has little or no opportunity to see. Less well-known films like *Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain* (Xie Jin, 1985), *The Street Players* (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1987) and *The Trouble-Shooters* (Mi Jiashan, 1988) are discussed more briefly or in passing, opening up the canon just a little, but the bulk of the discussion is devoted to films most scholars and serious students would have or could have seen And though some of the films discussed belong to the pre-contemporary

era (*Street Angel* [Yuan Mu-jih, 1937] most particularly) the bulk of the films are from the mid 1980s to early 1990s. The book's subtitle clearly indicates the focus on 'contemporary Chinese cinema' which in this case means recent, but not, on the other hand, especially new That is, the Fifth Generation is again valorized, but for good and compelling reasons

China into Film would make a fine textbook. With over a dozen films carefully analyzed for their visual qualities, relationship to traditional art and source material, and to their immediate cultural moment (in a sociocultural and industrial context), the book provides a model of in-depth discussions. Its reproduction, including many colour plates, of numerous art works and film stills models the art history classroom, where the visual evidence is primary. The prose is inviting (though the number of footnotes is often forbidding!) and the reasoning is measured. I hope the author has a chance to note that the proper title (in English) of Siegfried Kracauer's classic study of German Expressionist cinema is *From Caligari to Hitler* (not *From Hitler to Caligari*) (p. 324) and that it was Tsui Hark (not Tsi Hark) who co-directed *King of Chess* (p 336)

review:

Mette Hjort and Ib Bondebjerg (eds), *The Danish Directors: Dialogues on a Contemporary National Cinema.* Bristol: Intellect Press, 2001, 288 pp.

SCOTT MacKENZIE

Until the early 1990s, Danish cinema in the international context was known primarily because of one auteur. Carl Theodor Dreyer. His presence in the pantheon of European art cinema directors made him more of an anomaly than a representative vision of Danish national cinema culture While elements of his work might have embodied a certain Danish ethos, its singularity – like that of Ingmar Bergman's work in Sweden – made him, at best, a movement of one

The arrival of Lars von Trier on the international art cinema and festival circuit, most noticeably with *Europa/Zentropa* in 1991, changed the way in which Danish cinema was perceived. Von Trier's work, drawing freely from pre- and postwar European art cinema traditions, was in many ways as singular a vision of the cinema as that of Dreyer's The difference, in von Trier's case, was that he was followed by a coterie of Danish filmmakers into international film consciousness The circulation of the Dogme '95 manifesto, co-authored by Thomas Vinterberg, and Vinterberg's subsequent success with *Festen* (1998), brought new Danish films to the forefront of contemporary debates about both the future and possible death of European art cinema. Perhaps improbably, the new Danish cinema became the last of the European new waves of the twentieth century

Mette Hjort and Ib Bondebjerg's *The Danish Directors* rides on the crest of the wave of interest in new Danish cinema, but it also adds depth and insight into forty years of a national cinema that, until recently, has existed at the margins of international film culture

The nineteen interviews conducted by the editors cover the gamut of modes of production and cinematic genres, from the children's film to the heritage film, and indeed, to Dogme '95

The Danish Directors begins with two complementary introductions that examine current debates surrounding Danish cinema The first addresses the role played by globalization in the formation of contemporary art cinemas, the second considers the four generations of Danish directors featured in the book. Both give a context to the debates about Danish cinema and national identity that follow in the interviews proper. Here we see that Danish directors are looking both inward and outward: on the one hand, to the history of Danish politics, cinema, national identity and culture; on the other, to European art cinema traditions and Classical Hollywood

Of interest are the strikingly different ways that the directors conceptualize contemporary Danish cinema For instance, Gabriel Axel, the oldest filmmaker in the book, best known in Western Europe and North America for the Oscar-winning film *Babettes gaestebud/Babette's Feast* (1987), but a director in Denmark since the 1950s, began his career making Danish popular comedies in the tradition of the Olsen Gang cycle of films. Axel argues that the European 'point system' (whereby each member of the crew is allotted a certain amount of points if they are European, and if enough points are accrued the film becomes officially 'European') and the preponderance of international coproductions lead to films that lack narrative cohesion and reflect no discernible national identity According to Axel, European cinema should be judged by a French person making a film in France or a Dane making a Danish film and not by attempts to construct a sense of 'European' identity

By way of contrast, Erik Clausen's social realist films represent another pole in Danish cinema Scathing in his attacks on what he sees as the outcome of globalization and American imperialism, Clausen, who directed *Rami og Julie/Rami and Juliet* (1988) and *Min fynske barndom/Carl, My Childhood Symphony* (1994), argues that a properly Danish cinema outside the narrative structures of US cinema must be developed Clausen is dismissive of US forms of cinematic narration, as he finds them formulaic and imaginatively impoverished Unlike Axel, Clausen attacks Hollywood hegemony far more than he does the Euro-Pudding 'quality' cinema

Bille August, who directed Bergman adaptations such as *Den goda viljan/The Best Intentions* (1992) and is probably best known for his heritage films such as *Pelle Erobreren/Pelle the Conqueror* (1987) and *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne/Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1997), is part of a very different tradition in Danish film from that of Clausen and Axel Making a series of Scandinavian and European coproductions, August argues that the director's audience (on both the national and international level) must be considered while making a film August argues that as filmmakers desire large audiences, the

ways in which narratives translate beyond national boundaries is a key consideration in the production of films in an era of globalization August also discusses negotiating the process of making *The Best Intentions* from Bergman's script and the worries he had in approaching the adaptation of the work of the filmmaker most greatly associated with Scandinavian cinema. August therefore is at the forefront of filmmakers trying to find an international film language that still reflects some intrinsically 'Scandinavian' qualities

If the older generations of Danish directors attempt to negotiate Danish and Scandinavian identity in the face of Europe and the USA, the newer generation of Danish filmmakers seem to have more in common with the cinephiles of the French *nouvelle vague* and the New American cinema of Scorsese and Coppola than with their Scandinavian predecessors *Enfant terrible* Lars von Trier addresses his role in the revitalization of Danish cinema, his investment in both the European art cinema tradition and US genre film, and finally the contentious issue of whether or not the proclamations of the Dogme brethren are serious. While von Trier's preferred mode of address is that of *agent provocateur*, his proposal for the 'Open Film City' reprinted in the book, which recalls the activism of the 1960s and the concurrent desire to get 'media into the hands of the people', demonstrates that his irony in counterbalanced by his quite idealistic desire to reconceptualize the cinema. Like von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, director of the acclaimed *Festen* – the film that signalled the breakthrough for the Dogme '95 movement – demonstrates a profound love/hate relationship to Danish culture, while maintaining a sceptical view of Europe.

Along with these internationally recognized directors, *The Danish Directors* also includes interviews with many other figures far better known inside Denmark than within international film culture Indeed, this is one of the strengths of the volume: to discover the feminist films of Jytte Rex, the multicultural cinema of Susanne Bier, or the Hollywood exploits of *Nightwatch* (1998) director Ole Bornedal Throughout the volume, the questions posed by Bondebjerg and Hjort amount to mini-dissertations of the roles played by national identity, globalization and minor cinema culture in the production and conceptualization of contemporary Danish film The nature of the questions allows the filmmakers to address issues that are often left by the wayside in typical interview situations. the directors are questioned not only about their work, but also about how it relates to their conceptualizations of Danish, Scandinavian and European identity

The Danish Directors brings to light many films, and foregrounds the fact that minor cinemas such as Denmark's – or for that matter, those of other minor cultures, like those of Scotland or Québec, for instance – should receive a wider international public *The Danish Directors* highlights not only the specificities of Danish cinema, but

also the similarities between the struggles faced by Danish directors and those of other minor cinema cultures trying to find a voice within the international public sphere of film culture One hopes that others will follow the lead of *The Danish Directors* and that these kinds of interventions from other minor cinema cultures will blossom